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THE SCOTTISH  
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

# Scottish Bird News

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Edited by Valerie Thom  
assisted by Stanley da Prato

## Golden Jubilee 1936-86

It was, to be precise, on 24 March 1936 that just six people got together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh to lay the foundations of the Club. It was a different world then in many ways. Field ornithology had only a small following of enthusiasts. There were no field-guides (until 1954, the year after *The Birds of Scotland*) nor even the Handbook, and binoculars were comparatively expensive. The shot-gun was the final arbiter in identification; indeed as the phrase at that time had it: "What's hit is history and what's missed is mystery". But there was a wonderful sense of discovery and pioneering in a new area, very much on an amateur basis — a voluntary and dedicated activity done out of love for the subject.

Since the war we have seen the Club grow to thirteen Branches, from Thurso to Stranraer. When I visited all but one of them last session I was very much struck by the way they all continue the friendly and sociable atmosphere of the early Club and also something of that amateur spirit among all the members, including the now numerous professional ornithologists! The activities of the Club range from the light-hearted to the serious but never, I hope, the solemn.

The last twenty years in particular have seen a tremendous increase in interest in wildlife and the natural environment, creating a greater awareness of its problems as well as giving a lot of pleasure. Some natural history societies have grown enormously, and the interest has been fuelled by the media and by a great range of fine books. The Club has benefited from this in one respect, in that the Bird Bookshop has grown within that time from nothing to a record turnover this year of well over £100,000. The Bookshop surplus provides useful funds for the Club and has cushioned and delayed subscription increases. It is all the more disappointing, therefore, that membership of the SOC has remained at much the same figure of around three thousand during the period of increasing membership elsewhere.

Perhaps "Ornithologists" in our title deters some people. Perhaps we do not take enough trouble to make ourselves known. I hope that during this Jubilee Year our various activities and developments, with new publications and design, will bring the Club to the notice of many potential members and that we will see an increase during the next year or two.

So in this connection a warm welcome

to this first edition of *Scottish Bird News*, which four times a year will be bringing you up-to-date news about ornithology in Scotland and the latest happenings around the Branches. Thanks are due to the Editor and other members and staff who have made this possible.

The Editor, Valerie Thom, is also the author of the new *Birds in Scotland* to be published by T. and A. D. Poyser later this month and launched at a reception in Glasgow to mark the Jubilee. This book has been sponsored by the Club and will provide a new base-line for birdwatching in Scotland for many years to come. Its publication is our main event for Jubilee Year and there is (just) still time to order a copy at the pre-publication price.

Branches are organising their own celebratory events of various kinds, and the Jubilee will also be marked by our two conferences, at Aberdeen in April and North Berwick in November, and given tangible form in a number of souvenir objects. Altogether it promises to be an excellent year for the Club and one which I hope our younger members will look back to with pleasure at the Club's centenary!

John M. S. Arnott  
President

### True or false?

"In plantation forestry the end of the rotation is marked by clear-felling. This is rarely followed by immediate replanting, either because of delays in preparing the ground for planting or for sanitary reasons associated with beetle damage. As a result the land is once more open and will provide suitable habitat for moorland birds for slightly more than the original six years (following the initial ploughing and planting). This means that for some some seven years out of every fifty the land will provide harbours for birds of the wild upland." — Extract from *Quart. J. Forestry* 67:253-254.

(Thanks to John Mitchell for the extract and Bernie Zonfrillo for the illustration)

JUST THINK - ITS ALL OURS AGAIN FOR UP TO SEVEN YEARS!



See also Conference report, page 8.

## Duich Moss — an on-going saga

The Greenland White-fronted Goose is a species for which we in Scotland have a special responsibility. Apart from two small flocks in Wales, the wintering population is almost equally split between Scotland and Ireland. In world terms the total population is small; past counts suggest that numbers fell from about 17,500-23,000 birds in the 1950s to about 14,300-16,600 in the late 1970s. The decline seemed due to several factors, the most important of which was the loss of traditional peatland habitat in Ireland. Worries about this, and the birds' consistently low productivity, led to a recent flurry of conservation and research activity.

The first comprehensive census of the winter population was organised in 1982/83. At the same time the White-fronted Goose was given complete protection in Scotland under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, and a three-year moratorium on shooting was introduced in Ireland. In February 1985 the first change in wildlife legislation in Greenland since the country became politically autonomous gave the species protection throughout the summer, and Iceland is now considering similar action for the months in which the geese stage there during migration. The Irish shooting ban came up for renewal in 1985 and, against the advice of the Wildlife Advisory Committee, the Minister for Fisheries and Forestry granted limited hunting on the main Irish haunt, the Wexford Slob, from 16 November to 4 January. It is important that higher mortality there should not jeopardise the recovery of the population elsewhere, so the effects of this resumption of shooting will be monitored closely.

Here in Scotland the Greenland White-front has been much in the media following the Secretary of State's decision to allow commercial peat-cutting on Duich Moss, Islay, the most important roost site in Britain. The plan to cut peat there drew a large number of objections from conservationists, including those of the Government's own Nature Conservancy Council and the SOC. The case is a fascinating one and deserves a fuller analysis than can be given here. In particular it has illuminated how, in the face of strong scientific evidence, political decisions to destroy important wildlife sites can be taken without any fundamental justification being given. Further, it has shown how cases such as this, not in themselves conceptually difficult, can be distorted and trivialised by the media.

One of the important points never brought out in media reporting of the case is the fact that Duich Moss is a nationally important peatland in its own right. It is a virtually undamaged and hydrologically intact raised/blanket bog and as such qualifies as a Grade 1 Site of Special Scientific Interest. Yet from reports of the ructions on Islay last summer one would have thought that the affair was all about 'geese v. jobs'. Such simplification into a development *versus* conservation battle makes a nice story but hides the truth of the matter; not a single job was at risk from the conservation proposals.

Scottish Malt Distillers Ltd require peat for the production of blended spirit and malts such as Lagavulin. They applied for, and

obtained, permission to dig peat from Duich Moss — although abundant supplies of peat of suitable quality exist elsewhere on Islay. Under the terms of a management agreement offered by the NCC full compensation would be given for any additional costs incurred through use of an alternative site — an offer which would secure jobs in the industry and is a far cry from the distorted jobs v. geese picture.

What of the current position? Greenland Whitefronts are listed in Annex 1 of the European Communities Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. This obliges the Government to take special steps to conserve the geese, including notification of the most important sites as 'Special Protection Areas' (SPA). In September 1984 the European Commission wrote to the Government specifically requesting that the site be given SPA status. A mere three months later the Secretary of State confirmed planning permission, rejecting the NCC's call for a moratorium to allow research to be undertaken with a view to minimising the impact of the development.

In view of the breach of the Directive, the RSPB and others formally complained to the European Commission, as a result of which Commission representatives visited Islay in October. Both the development area on the Moss and the various alternative sites for peat extraction were inspected. During the visit it was discovered that a large drainage ditch had been dug in contravention of the planning permission, which stipulated that the development was to be undertaken in three Phases: before any work was undertaken in Phase Two there was to be a full review of the impact of the first Phase; and no work was to be undertaken outwith Phase One until at least 12 years after the start of work on the bog. The Government's stance on the case has always been that the planning conditions are adequate to avoid damage to the conservation interest. This is strongly refuted by the NCC, who have stated that "no conditions will suffice to avoid serious and irreversible damage to the bog". Be that as it may, it appears that even the limited conditions imposed have been breached within months of work starting on the site. Worse still, it took the chance visit of a European official to discover the ditch on Phase Two ground; there had been no monitoring of the development by either the District Council or the Scottish Office.

The ramifications of the case seem likely to continue for a long time. The Commission are set to take legal action against the Government for failure to follow



the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive. What the outcome of this will be is hard to judge, but hopefully it will lead, in one way or another, to Scottish Malt Distillers agreeing to use one of the other suitable sources of peat on the island.

What of the consequences for the Greenland Whitefronts if the development goes ahead? In Ireland similar developments led to the geese gradually deserting a site. Returning to Greenland in poorer condition they have produced fewer young and the population has slowly declined. Geese aside, however, the large *Sphagnum* flow areas of Duich Moss would be immediately and irreversibly damaged by mechanical peat extraction. One can only hope that wiser counsel will prevail and that unnecessary damage to the moss will not occur.

David A. Stroud

*Until recently David Stroud, the author of this article, worked with the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study (whose logo is reproduced here). The GWGS is based at the University College of Wales but David spent most of the last 5 years on Islay, making summer expeditions to Greenland. He now works for NCC.*

## The Great Auk — dead or alive?

Does the Great Auk still survive on Papa Westray, where the species was last recorded in 1813? According to the *Orcadian* some folk believe that it does and are mounting "the first serious ornithological expedition of its kind" with the aim of confirming that "the Great Auk is still very much alive". The team of five adventurers, led by Doug Yates (forester and leader of the back-up team for a recent Rockall expedition), will sail during May from Findhorn in the sloop 'Celerity' and will use inflatable dinghies and special nets to scour the coast of Papay. The rest of the team, dubbed "the raiders of the lost auk", are skipper Shuttleworth and a professional pilot, a farmer and a flight engineer. Canadian Club has sponsored this "uncommon challenge" — so presumably the SOC will not be asked for an Endowment Fund Grant. If the 'raiders' succeed in their aim, however, we will clearly have to mount an enquiry into the blinkered vision of RSPB personnel and others who regularly visit the island!

(Thanks to Eric Meek for the details of this story — Eds.)

## More tree-nesting Dippers

Marion Shimeld's note on tree-nesting Dippers on the River Almond in Perthshire (SB 13:117) stimulated reports of similar nest-sites in other areas. Brian Stewart sent the accompanying photograph of a nest found during an Aberdeen Branch outing in April 1985, on the River Don at Kemnay. It had been built in flood debris caught on the lower branches of an alder. Three years earlier Brian had found one in a similar situation but closer to the trunk, higher up the Don. From Angus Norman Atkinson reported that a March 1984 survey of the Southesk and its main tributaries (by M. A. Bushby, C. J. Eatough, C. Riddell and himself) located 67 pairs of Dippers on 101km of river. Twenty-four pairs were apparently using man-made structures, including bridges, weirs and pipes, and most of the remainder were nesting in natural cliff and bank-overhang sites. But on the Southesk in lower Glen Clova one occupied nest was in a witch's broom on an overhanging birch, about 6m from the bank and 3m above the water. While such sites may not be typical, they may well be commoner than is generally thought. As Norman commented, ringers and nest-recorders tend to concentrate on checking man-made structures, so BTO nest records may be biased.

Photo Brian Stewart



## Magpies teasing Golden Eagle

The Magpies which frequent my garden are real chancers, as their great delight is teasing my captive injured Golden Eagle. She totally ignores them apart from occasionally turning her head upside down to get a different angle on their activities. One morning last July,

after heavy overnight rain had left 4-5" of water lying on the lawn, the Magpies demonstrated yet another opportunist habit. The parents and the 1985 crop of three youngsters went wading through the flood, sometimes up to their bellies but more often just up to the "ankles", having a great feed of worms and other beasties which had been drowned. It was rather like watching a gathering of gourmets, all dressed up in full evening wear, black ties and tails, gorging themselves!

John B. Murray

## Peregrine as prey of Golden Eagle

In 1978 I reported the finding of a Peregrine apparently killed by a Golden Eagle (SB 10:234). On 9 July 1985 I was watching the eyrie of a different pair of Ross-shire eagles when the female came in carrying an item of prey. After she had gone I went up to the eyrie to identify the prey brought in. It proved to be the part-eaten carcass of a Peregrine, identified by the yellow taloned feet with a very long middle toe and the few feathers still clinging to it. I believe it was a recently-fledged bird of the year. This and the 1978 instance remain the only times I have recorded Peregrines as prey in 28 years study of the prey brought to Golden Eagle eyries in Inverness-shire and Ross-shire.

Lea McNally

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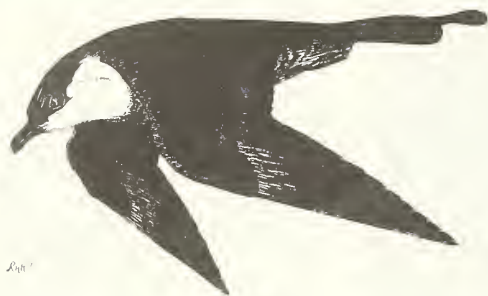
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## Pom Skua records wanted

A report on the exceptional influx of Pomarine Skuas is being compiled and records from anywhere in Britain are wanted. Data on numbers of adults (with details of colour phases) or juveniles, date, time and location of observations, and any information on the birds' behaviour, or how this season's numbers compare with previous years, will be welcomed by **Simon Aspinall, RSPB Highland Office, Munloch, IV8 8ND** or **Tony Fox, NCC, 9 Culduthel Road, Inverness IV2 4AG**. All contributions will be fully acknowledged.

## Recent Reports

*These notes cover the period October to December; they include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to Pete Ellis, Houss, East Burra, Shetland, via local recorders, at the end of March, June, September and December.*

Late autumn brought very few common migrants, Scandinavian thrushes in particular being in short supply. There were, however, several extreme rarities, including two more new records for Scotland — a **Forster's Tern** which stayed at Musselburgh and Granton from 6 October to 9 November, and a **Red-eyed Vireo** which spent several days in Caithness in early October.

The most unusual aspect of the autumn was the large influx of **Pomarine Skuas** into the North Sea, presumably displaced by adverse weather conditions from their more usual Atlantic route. This unprecedented movement began on 9 October with one at Sullom. Then 200-300 were reported from fishing boats off Shetland on 22 October, 34 were off Fair Isle on 27th, a total of 50 were reported from Orkney and 120 passed Peterhead during the month. At least 100 were in the Inner Moray Firth in early November. Hound Point in the Forth had peaks of 47 on 25 October and 35 on 23 November, and 200 were between North Berwick and Barns Ness on 31 October. One was still in Shetland on 11 December and 9 were seen in the Beaulieu Firth on Christmas Day. Some of

these birds were very tame — a birdwatcher in Unst received a sharp peck on the hand from one skua which landed on the roof of his car!

Other seabird records of note included 30 blue **Fulmars** at Sumburgh on 24 October, a **Cory's Shearwater** at North Ronaldsay and a marked movement of **Little Auks**. Two hundred passed south off Sumburgh in one hour on 4 November, and there were 53 at Peterhead on 16 November, 238 at Musselburgh on 17th, 90 at Gosford, 50 at Hound Point and 150 at Fife Ness. Two **Long-tailed Skuas** were seen in Shetland, 2 in Orkney and 2-3 in the Inner Moray Firth, including an adult which landed at Chanonry Point — much to the delight of an Inverness SOC outing. In November vast numbers of sprats in the Beaulieu Firth were feeding 8000 **Guillemots** along with tens of thousands of gulls — I have never seen such a large number of gulls in one place before.

**Pink-footed Geese** peaked at 27,900 at Strathbeg and **Greylags** at 19,900 at Davan and Kinord. **Barnacle Geese** at Aberlady reached a maximum of 180 and 12 **Brent Geese** were in South Uist in October. At Aberlady **Wigeon** reached 1090, double the previous peak count. An unusual movement of **Long-tailed Ducks** occurred in Shetland, with 300 off Sumburgh on 27 October. Unusually high counts were also recorded in the Western Isles, East Lothian and Ayrshire but numbers in the Moray Firth were low.

A **Snowy Owl** reached Lewis and **Long-eared Owls** were seen in small numbers in the northern isles and on the east coast; Fair Isle had a record count of 14 on 26 October and one Orkney roost held 20 in December. Fair Isle had 6 **Richard's Pipits** and an **Eastern Yellow Wagtail** in October, when a **Citrine Wagtail** was at Musselburgh. Small numbers of **Waxwings** appeared in the northern isles and east coast counties, and more unusually at Ullapool and Mallaig. Scandinavian thrushes were relatively scarce; Fair Isle had maxima of only 1600 **Fieldfares** and 2300 **Redwings**. The bird of 1985 for me was the **White's Thrush** at Catfirth, Shetland, on 10 October.



**Coal Tits** turned up on Orkney for the first time since 1949, and one on Barra was the first record for the island. Orkney also had a **Blue Tit**, a **Great Tit** and 2 **Treecreepers**. The Sumburgh **Brown Shrike** stayed into October, when a **Red-backed Shrike** was at Culter; **Great Grey Shrikes** were scarce, the only report being one at Davan in October. There was a small influx of **Mealy Redpolls** in Shetland in November, when a few **Arctic Redpolls** also appeared. An immature **Two-barred Crossbill** was seen by many birders in the Carron Valley from mid October to the end of the year. Small numbers of **Common Crossbills** continued to appear in the north isles and along the east coast, and a **Parrot Crossbill** was found dead in Orkney in October. The Whalsay **Blackpoll Warbler** stayed into October. Small numbers of **Lapland Buntings** were seen in the north but more than usual appeared in East Lothian. Fair Isle had a **Rustic Bunting** and 5 **Little Buntings** in October and Aberdeenshire had its first **Little Bunting** in November

Pete Ellis

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## Wildfowl Counts — Central Region

Several of the regular contributors to the winter wildfowl counts in Central Region moved away from the area during 1985, leaving some significant gaps in the coverage. I would, therefore, be pleased to receive offers of help from anyone able to visit one or more sites on a reasonably regular monthly basis from September through to March. **D. Thorogood, 4 Archers Avenue, Stirling FK7 7RJ**. Tel. No. 0786-815797.

# The 1985 heronry census

## Some preliminary results

The 1985 BTO heronry census in Scotland had three main aims i) to estimate the total number of Herons breeding in Scotland, ii) to estimate their relative abundance in various parts of Scotland and iii) to determine any changes that may have taken place since the previous census in 1954. The method was simply to locate as many colonies as possible and count the number of occupied nests in each colony.

Unfortunately the number of nests counted on one visit in April or May tends to underestimate the actual number of breeding Herons as some pairs fail early or nest late and so remain undetected. In 1985 sixteen colonies were visited several times throughout the breeding season and the progress of all nesting attempts monitored to give an accurate assessment of the number of breeding pairs in each colony. Single visits to these colonies in April or May, on average, underestimated the total number of breeding pairs by about 22%. A more serious problem is that Herons frequently move their nesting locality so that known colonies can decline, or become 'extinct', as the birds move to a new nesting locality sometimes two or three kilometres away. In no part of Scotland were there sufficient active BTO members to search every potential breeding site so we do not know how many heronries were missed in 1985. The best we can do is to guess at the number missed by looking for places that have had heronries in recent years but where there was no record for 1985. The optimistic assumption is that such heronries have not become extinct but merely moved to some undiscovered place.



Photo W. S. Paton

By the end of 1985 most census cards had been returned, reporting visits to 213 active heronries. Assuming that all heronries recorded in the last decade were still in existence, it was estimated that about 125 remained uncounted. This figure will be at least 15 to 20 less when some outstanding cards are returned. The number of colonies actually counted is more than in previous

Scottish heronry censuses in 1928/29 and in 1954, when 110 and 177 colonies respectively were counted. It is possible that there are more heronries now than formerly but it is more likely that the higher figure for 1985 is the result of better observer coverage.

The dispersion and size of heronries in various regions is similar to that recorded previously. For example heronries are very scarce in Caithness and Wigtownshire, more abundant in Central Scotland and at their greatest density in north Argyll and the Hebrides. Colonies were smallest in the north-east of Scotland with an average of only 5.4 occupied nests counted, whereas those in Central Scotland were much larger with an average of 8.3 nests. The largest colonies were of 40 nests (in Lanarkshire) and 37 nests (Easter Ross). Comparing the three census years, heronries in 1985 seemed to be of similar size to those counted in 1928/29 and larger than in 1954 in all areas except the north-east (Table). Overall, 1470 occupied heron nests were counted in the 213 colonies. Assuming that the remaining

| Area                   | Average number of occupied nests<br>(number of colonies) |           |           |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
|                        | 1928/29                                                  | 1954      | 1985      |
| Borders and south-west | 7.8 (43)                                                 | 5.6 (37)  | 7.4 (48)  |
| Central                | 8.7 (11)                                                 | 6.0 (22)  | 8.3 (37)  |
| North-east             | 3.6 (10)                                                 | 5.8 (26)  | 5.4 (21)  |
| Highlands and Islands  | 6.8 (46)                                                 | 6.5 (92)  | 6.5 (107) |
| Total                  | 7.1 (110)                                                | 6.1 (117) | 6.9 (213) |

uncounted heronries were of similar size, and that observers consistently underestimated the number of breeding pairs by 22%, we can optimistically estimate the population of herons breeding in Scotland in 1985 at about 2950 pairs. The actual population may be considerably less if some of the 'missing' heronries had not moved but become extinct.

As many of you now know, heronries are not always easy to find, nor are the nests always easy to count. Nevertheless I hope the success of the 1985 survey will encourage a sustained interest by some people to follow the fortunes of their local heronries. The British Trust for Ornithology wishes to maintain the heronry survey in Scotland and will require as large an annual sample of counts as is possible. Finally I wish to thank all those who helped with the survey and remind those who have not submitted their records to do so as soon as possible. The full report of the 1985 survey will appear in due course in *Bird Study*.

Mick Marquiss

## Barn Owl incubating domestic fowl eggs

On 8 May 1985 we visited an occupied farm in the Cree Valley, Galloway, to inspect a nest box erected there for Barn Owls. During conversation the landowner informed us that on several occasions he had found it necessary to remove from the box eggs laid by a farmyard hen, which had somehow gained access despite the fact that the box was at a height of almost 7m. When we entered the building a female Barn Owl left the box. On inspection we found a clutch of seven eggs — three Barn Owl eggs and four domestic hen eggs. The domestic fowl eggs were slightly larger and browner. We decided to remove them in the owl's absence and hoped she would not desert the nest; they were warm and contained live embryos. When A. D. inspected the box again on 11 July he was pleased to find one almost-fledged owlet inside the box.

A. Dowell & G. Shaw

## Thanks

to all who have helped with this first issue of SBN: our artists — Bernie Zonfrillo, Angus Hogg, Bill Brackenridge? (initials too small to decipher!), Iain Macleod, and Andy Dowell; all who sent in copy; and Malcolm Ware, John D. & Jacquie, who helped with layout. We hope you like it — and that you will keep us well supplied with material.

V.M.T. & S. da P.

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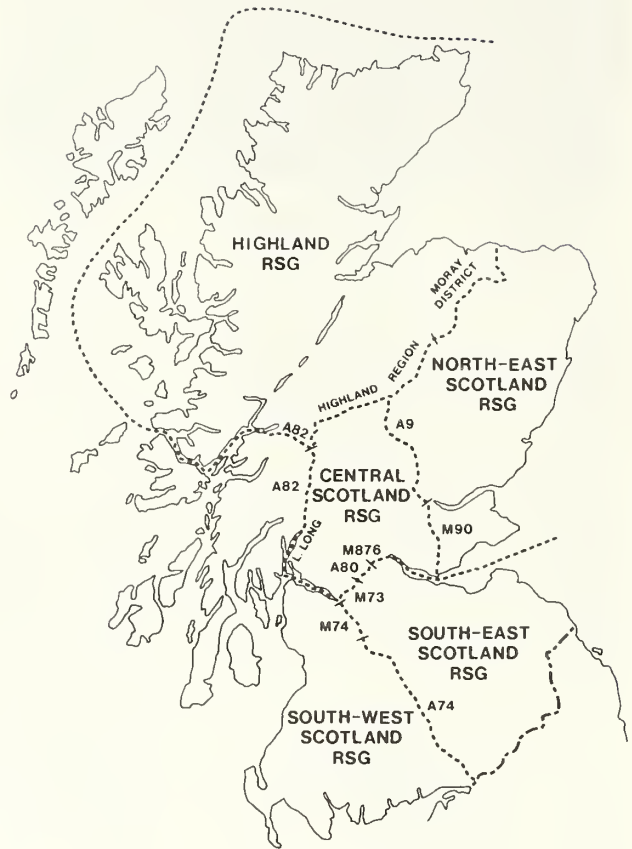
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# Raptor Results '85

This report summarises the main activities of four of the five Raptor Study Groups now active in Scotland (Highland is to be documented separately). Species studied include Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Merlin with some members specialising in other raptors such as Hen Harrier and Kestrel. A total of 49 occupied Golden Eagle ranges and 248 Peregrine sites were monitored and there was increased coverage of Merlin, with much interesting data gathered on this species.

The map shows the area covered by each group: North-east (NE), Central (C), South-east (SE) and South-west (SW); SW includes the islands of Bute and Arran. This is the fifth annual summary for NE and the second for the other three groups. The data summarised represent a huge contribution in time and effort by a large number of raptor workers throughout Scotland, most of whom are voluntary and work solely in their spare time. These notes are presented on behalf of all four groups.

Dave Dick (RSPB) & Iain MacLeod



## Golden Eagle

**North-east Scotland RSG** Birds were present in 33 home ranges, out of which 11, possibly 12, were successful. Although generally wetter than in previous study years, the weather seemed to have no adverse effects on breeding success. Two failures may have been due to egg robberies. One pair laid three eggs but failed, and at least two females re-laid but both failed. Only one chick was ringed. **Central Scotland RSG** Birds were present in at least 16 home ranges. Nine to twelve pairs laid, with five pairs successfully fledging six young. One nest was robbed of eggs. A sad event was the discovery in November of a dead adult female eagle under an electricity pylon in the only home range in this area to fledge two young this year. It may be some time before we see fledged young in this glen again.

| Golden eagle breeding success in 1985                                              |       |      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------|
|                                                                                    | NE    | C    |
| Home range/sites with bird(s) present                                              | 33    | 16+  |
| Home range/sites in which eggs laid (probably laid)                                | 22(3) | 9(3) |
| Home range/sites in which eggs hatched (probably hatched)                          | 13(1) | 5(?) |
| Home range/sites in which eggs failed to hatch                                     | 8-9   | ?    |
| Home range/sites at which young fledged (large young seen but fledging not proved) | 11(2) | 5    |
| Total young fledged (probably fledged)                                             | 14(6) | 6    |

## Kestrel

**South-west Scotland RSG (Gordon Riddle)** After last year's phenomenal success 1985 was disappointing. The season started well, with a dry spring producing a very high average clutch size of 5.2, but the wettest late spring and summer on record produced a poor hatching rate and increased failure at the brood stage. Of the 46 territories visited 34 (74%) were occupied. Of 135 eggs in 26 known full clutches 93 hatched and 78 young were reared, 72 of which (19 broods) were ringed.

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Telephone: Blairgowrie (0250) 4605.



## Peregrine

**North-east Scotland RSG** Breeding success was quite high despite the very wet summer, with at least 84 young fledged from 43 successful sites. At two sites females vanished and eggs were deserted, one brood was probably stolen, another drowned at 3 weeks old, one clutch was smashed and one was deserted because of disturbance from tree-planting in the area; a few chicks vanished or died at hatching. At two inland sites single chicks were known to fledge from definite second clutches. Coastal sites again fared poorly (although better than last year). Three pairs laid out of five occupied sites, with only one definitely fledging a chick.

**Central Scotland RSG** The spring was dry but cool, producing average clutch sizes, but the cold wet summer brought some problems, with a few weather-related failures. A total of 92+ young fledged from 43 of the 71 occupied sites. Prey items of note this year included Short-eared Owl, Kestrel and juvenile Hen Harrier as well as Manx Shearwater and Guillemot at two inland sites. A young mountain hare was also recorded!

**South-west Scotland RSG** This area still has several problems with egg-collecting; there were at least six definite robberies this season. A man apprehended at one site with the help of a Raptor Group member had in his possession a clutch of eggs which he had intended to hatch out and use for falconry. He was later fined £900 and had his car confiscated. The eggs were returned to the nest but failed due to predation. Despite such deliberate vandalism a total of 96 young were reared from 66 breeding pairs.

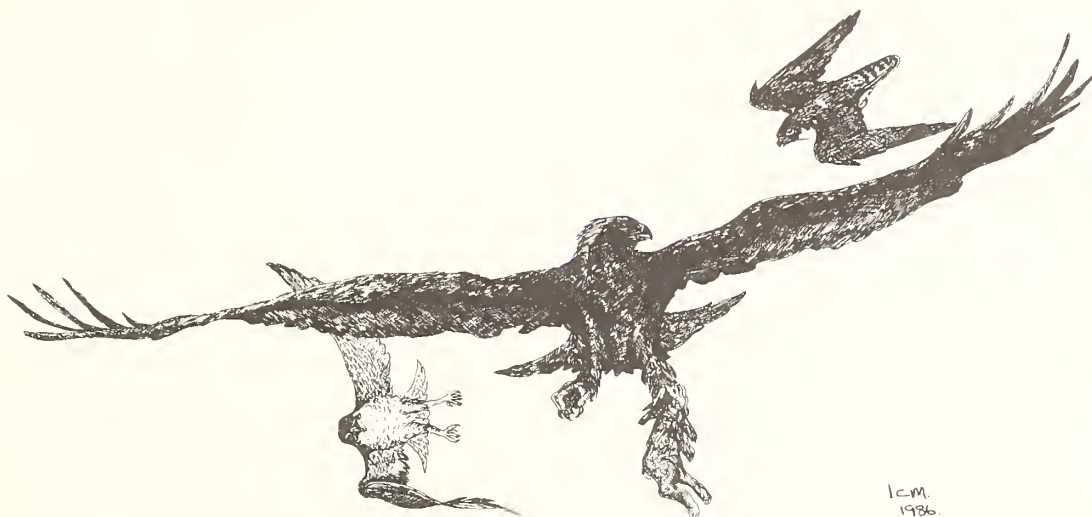
**South-east Scotland RSG** A poorer year than 1984, with only 22 young fledged from 10 successful sites. The weather seemed to affect breeding success; broods were smaller and there were no broods of four (six in 1984). At least three nests were robbed and the repeat clutches from two of them were probably taken as well. A further one or two nests failed through human disturbance. One coastal site was successful.

### Peregrine breeding success in 1985

|                                                           | NE    | C     | SE  | SW  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
| Home range/sites with bird(s) present                     | 86-87 | 71    | 24  | 75  |
| Home range/sites with eggs laid<br>(probably laid)        | 59(1) | 52(5) | 19  | 55  |
| Home range/sites with eggs hatched<br>(probably hatched)  | 49    | 45(1) | 11  | 41  |
| Home range/sites with young fledged<br>(probably fledged) | 43    | 43    | 10  | 39+ |
| Total young fledged (probably fledged)                    | 84(9) | 92+   | 22+ | 82+ |

## Hen Harrier

**South-west Scotland RSG** This species, as is usual in this area, had mixed fortunes in 1985. Nests and eggs are still destroyed by some 'die-hard' keepers who continue to suffer from the age-old 'hook beak' syndrome. Harriers nesting in un-keepered areas fared better with 24 young reared from 18 breeding pairs monitored.



## Canna Seabirds in 1985

The long-term ringing and monitoring programme continued with the usual three visits made in May, July and August. 1985 was characterised by a late cold spring with predominantly northerly winds during April and May and this had some effect on laying dates, with Shags and Guillemots on open, north-facing sites laying later than those in more sheltered sites. Manx Shearwater numbers remained stable and breeding success in the observation burrows was above average, with 0.66 young produced per egg laid. Fulmar and Shag numbers remained high, but Shag breeding success was poor with only 1.2 young fledged per pair from 53 study nests; this was mainly due to high mortality of young in nests exposed to the above average rainfall — at the very open colony of Geugasgor virtually every nest contained one or more dead young. Gull

numbers generally remained stable, as did Black Guillemots; Razorbills and Guillemots increased slightly and Kittiwakes continued their slow decrease.

The ringing programme resulted in the handling of 5320 birds, including 3499 Guillemots, 648 Shags, 446 Herring Gulls, 363 Razorbills and 97 Manx Shearwaters; 350 Guillemots were colour-ringed. Details of 236 recoveries are given in Canna Report No. 11. Re-trappings and colour-ring sightings continue to give information on age of return to the island. One 3-year old, three 4-year old and thirteen 5/6-year old Herring Gulls were located in breeding colonies. Two 2-year old, one 3-year old and three 4-year old Guillemots were found in colonies but none were breeding; this contrasts with the period 1973-82 when Guillemot numbers were increasing rapidly and 19.2% of all

known first-time breeders were under 5 years old.

Finally, July 1985 saw a large wreck of 2700 Guillemots in Loch Linnhe just south of Canna (*BTO News* No 140,3. 1985). Three first-summer Canna birds were involved in this wreck which appeared to be caused by a food shortage leading to starvation. Examination of fish samples collected from breeding adults on Canna, and examination of chick weights against wing length, showed that growth was normal and that breeding birds on Canna were unaffected by the adverse conditions further south.

R. L. Swann

(This note is based on a more comprehensive report deposited in the Waterston Library. Copies of Canna Report No. 11 are available on request (price 0.65p) from R. L. Swann, 28 Druimlon, Drumnadrochit, Inverness-shire. — Eds)

## North Berwick, 1985

The Club's 38th Conference was notable for the sustaining of the subject theme — Scottish Forestry and Birds — throughout the lectures, discussions and film show. This gave depth to the weekend and the Conference organisers are to be congratulated on having achieved this. The Marine provided excellent facilities as usual, with the superb catering giving a touch of inner warmth necessary to combat the temperatures prevailing both without and within the hotel.

### Afforestation theme

On Saturday morning John Arnott, President of the Club, introduced the Conference theme with a brief appraisal of the forestry situation in Scotland, then invited the four guest speakers to state their cases. Dr. Derek Langslow (NCC) compared the rich flora and fauna of natural forest with that of plantation forest and stressed the threat to the breeding grounds of Dunlin, Golden Plover and Greenshank, and to the hunting grounds of Golden Eagle and Raven, presented by increasing afforestation of land between 100 and 300m. This sub-montane level includes such valuable habitats as the peat flows of Sutherland and Caithness, the mountain bases of the Highlands and the hills of the Southern Uplands. He was critical of the piecemeal way in which forestry planning is handled by central and local government.

Roderick Leslie (FC) leapt boldly to the Forestry Commission's defence, stating that afforestation in Scotland had created the ideal environment for the expansion of such species as Crossbill, Siskin, Goshawk and Wryneck. While admitting that many practices had in the past been less than desirable, he cited better design of margins, with scrub and clearings, and improvement of areas for second crop planting, as examples of better husbandry now in use. However, it will take many years for the mistakes of the past to be rectified and much research into the ecology of forested areas still needs to be done.

David Minns (RSPB) detailed the benefit to landowners of the present planting grants and tax relief and criticised the agricultural support system which creates yet more mountains and lakes of surpluses, suggesting — somewhat contentiously — that farmers should be grant aided to plant their present barley acreage with timber. He felt that there was insufficient public consultation on an issue which the caring public were concerned about.

The final speaker was Ronnie Rose (Wildlife Manager to the Economic Forestry Group), who gave a very emotional plea that other foresters follow his example, catering for wildlife within their plans and exerting a degree of management of the ecological structure to benefit both wildlife and forestry. On the basis of 15 years practical experience at Eskdalemuir he maintains that his design of forest is very cost effective, resulting in less windblow, less animal damage, and easier pest control.

In the question and answer forum which concluded the session all four speakers dealt with questions from the audience. This was a very successful venture, which merited more time than was available.

### Honorary member

At the 49th Annual General Meeting the President announced that Dougal Andrew had been made an Honorary Member, in recognition of his many years' service as Law Agent, and expressed thanks to the staff for having achieved

a surplus on the year's accounts. The after-dinner toasts were proposed by Derek Langslow, who likened the SOC to an oak, slow to mature but strong in heart, and Chris Mylne, who looked back with nostalgia over his four decades of Club membership.

### Forest impacts

Three talks on current ornithological research were given on Sunday morning. Jeff Watson spoke on Golden Eagles in the west Highlands, with particular reference to the impact of plantation forestry on the winter hunting grounds of eagles, and Martin Cook compared the breeding success of tits in adjacent broadleaf and coniferous woodland in Morayshire. Stephanie Tyler presented the final talk on Dippers and acid waters in Wales, showing what a complex subject the relationship between afforestation and water pH had proved to be. Chris Mylne rounded off the session with a superb documentary on the Willow Grouse, filmed in north Norway.

Malcolm Ross

## Edinburgh Activities

With the facilities of the Club's premises at 21 Regent Terrace available, we are in the enviable position of being able to offer a particularly-full programme of events. In addition to the main lecture programme, two series of monthly indoor meetings are held. Library Evenings, featuring short talks by local experts, were attended by enthusiastic audiences who heard Alister Clunas speak on his work as a Countryside Ranger, Dave Dick of the RSPB on Bird Protection and Nigel Clark on the mysteries of Bird Trapping and Ringing. This series, although aimed particularly at those new to birdwatching, is open to all and the intimate nature of the venue makes for enjoyable audience participation.

The Waterston Library is also the venue for the Discussion Group. The whole gamut of Ornithological interests is represented here, from estuary counting to CBC studies, ringing to twitching, but all attending are expected to participate in cooperative fieldwork such as breeding surveys and goose counts. Progress reports on these surveys are given and lively discussion often follows on how effective they have been (and occasionally on how worthwhile they have been!) The Group also takes a keen interest in local issues affecting birds: recently it has voiced its fears that the proposed designation of the Pentlands Regional Park contains inadequate safeguards for conservation and has pressed for improved birdwatching facilities at Gladhouse Reservoir.

The Branch Committee is also working to improve the lot of birds and birdwatchers, such as by trying to persuade the SSEB to build a seawatching hide at its Torness Nuclear Power Station: with a raised walkway overlooking a warm water outlet the site would be ideal if only some protection could be provided from the northeasterly gales and lashing rain which push birds close inshore. The response so far has not been too encouraging but the Committee is 'sticking in'.

### Bird Bulletin

An issue of the South East Scotland Bird Bulletin is produced for each Branch Meeting. This free newssheet, eagerly snapped up by our members, lists recent bird records in our area and gives reports on outings and details of forthcoming talks. A recent feature article on developments at Musselburgh Lagoons gave promise of a Wader Scrape and Hide to be built in this rich but ever-changing birding site.

Field Outings continue to be popular with our

members, recent venues including Aberlady Bay and Musselburgh and more distant locations such as the Uists and Galloway. An outing to Carron Valley was to look for Bean Geese which, unfortunately, had moved through a few weeks previously. The party was rewarded, however, by finding a stunning adult male Two-barred Crossbill amongst a flock of Commons. Next day another observer failed to twitch this rarity but found an immature bird at the same place.

Peter R. Gordon

## Speyside Weekend

As their contribution to Jubilee Year the New Galloway Branch decided to be hosts at two birdwatching weekends. The first was at New Galloway in February; the second will be in Speyside, centred on the Aviemore end of the valley, from Friday 16 to Sunday 18 May.

This is an excellent area for birds and May is one of the best months up there. Nesting species include Capercaillie, Goldeneye, Golden Eagle, Greenshank, Osprey, Peregrine and Scottish Crossbill. The more energetic might like to climb the Cairngorms, where Dotterel, Ptarmigan and Snow Bunting should be seen. The RSPB Loch Garten Osprey Reserve and Insh Marshes Reserve are both within easy reach for the less energetic.

The weekend will be quite informal. Although no organised excursions are planned, several members who know the area well are willing to help beginners. The more experienced will probably want to go off on their own or in small groups. On the Friday and Saturday evenings members should gather at the Coylumbridge Hotel (on the B970, 1½ miles from Aviemore), when these ideas will be discussed.

### Beds and Boots!

Accommodation of all grades is available in Aviemore, Rothiemurchus/Coylumbridge, Boat of Garten and Nethybridge. Members who do not know the area should write to the Aviemore and Spey Valley Tourist Organisation, Main Road, Aviemore, Inverness-shire PH22 1PP, and ask for a copy of "What to do, what to see and where to stay in 1986" which lists hotels, B&Bs, self-catering, farms, etc. For those wishing to camp, the Loch Morlich and Coylumbridge sites are good centres. As the weather can be so variable on Speyside in May, take warm clothing, waterproofs and wellingtons — and hope that these will ensure a warm, dry weekend! Also take thermoses, OS maps and stout shoes or boots.

We hope to welcome as many members as possible from all over Scotland. Bring your friends or family along too. The scenery is magnificent and for non-birdwatchers the attractions on Speyside are many and varied, from alpine plant nurseries to steam train journeys . . . and there is always the Aviemore Centre! This weekend could be part of a longer spring holiday in the Highlands.

If a success, perhaps this May weekend could become once again an annual event, as early editions of *Scottish Birds* show was the case from 1958 until 1964. In those days it was based at the old Dell Hotel in Rothiemurchus. (Inclusive weekend terms from 1962-1964 were 55/- i.e. £2.75p!) Many members will recall those very enjoyable and friendly days in the company of George and Irene Waterston.

The New Galloway Branch Secretary and Chairman will be glad to answer any queries — but please remember to enclose a SAE if writing! Secretary: Miss Joan Howie, 60 Main St., St. John's Town of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire (Tel. Dalry (Kirks.) 226).

Chairman: Mrs Helen Halliday, "Dalveen", New Galloway, Kirkcudbrightshire (Tel. New Galloway 301).

## The Seabird Colony Register

In 1969 and 1970 the Seabird Group organised a census of seabirds breeding on the coasts of Britain and Ireland, during which almost the whole coastline was covered; the results were summarised in *The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland* by Cramp, Bourne and Saunders (1974). Since then, although a complete census has never been repeated, many of the main seabird colonies have been re-visited and censused again, some of them regularly. Various studies of seabird breeding biology have enabled the recommended techniques to be improved, leading to more accurate counts, prompter detection of changes in numbers, and increasingly sensitive measurement of population trends.

Despite the more accurate information now available for scattered sites throughout the country, it is still impossible to assess the relative importance of different regions or even of individual colonies. In 1984 the Seabird Group undertook the establishment of the Seabird Colony Register, the aims being to collect all seabird counts made since 1969, and to up-date the information by surveying as much as possible of the coastline. The counts will be stored in a computerised database where they can be easily up-dated in future, and will be readily accessible in a form suitable for a wide range of uses.

Completion of the Seabird Colony Register depends on the help of volunteers to survey the coastline during the next two summers. The presence or absence of breeding seabirds is to be recorded, with the exact location of active colonies and counts or estimates of the numbers of nesting birds. Much of the coast of England and Wales was covered in 1984, but Scotland, where the majority of British seabirds breed, is in urgent need of more recorders. The survey uses the coastline within each 10km OS square as its basic unit, and over half (56%) of the 785 squares of Britain (excluding the Channel Islands) are in Scotland — so now you see why we need your help!

Scotland has been divided into six regions for this survey, each with one or more regional organisers who will be co-ordinating coverage, and distributing instructions and the standard recording forms. Wherever you live you can help by covering stretches of coast this summer. Coverage is especially difficult to obtain in the more remote areas such as the north and west. Make this an excuse for visiting some of the wildest and most beautiful parts of our coastline. Please become involved in this worthwhile survey by contacting the regional organiser (see below) for the area you wish to cover. Also please allow any past information you have on seabird colonies, especially all counts, to be included in the Register (contact **Clare Lloyd, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE**. Tel. 0224-642863). We shall be very grateful for your help, however much or little of the coast you are able to cover, and whatever historical information you can provide.

*Clare Lloyd & Mark L. Tasker*

### Regional Organisers for Scotland

|                       |                                                                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Shetland:</b>      | <i>Martin Heubeck, 3 Lighthouse Buildings, Braewick Road, Lerwick.</i>   |
| <b>Orkney</b>         | <i>Eric Meek, Smyril, Stenness, Stromness.</i>                           |
| <b>N. Scotland</b>    | <i>Greg Mudge, Munloch, Ross &amp; Cromarty IV8 8ND.</i>                 |
| <b>North Section:</b> | <i>(W. Sutherland): Leslie Cranna, Old Bank Road, Golspie, KW10 6RS.</i> |
| <b>North Section:</b> | <i>(W. Ross): Jeff Watson, NCC, 9 Culduthel Road, Inverness IV2 4AG.</i> |
| <b>Skye:</b>          | <i>Andrew Currie, Glaiseilean, Broadford.</i>                            |
| <b>SW Section:</b>    | <i>Bob Swann, 28 Druimlon, Drumnadrochit, Inverness-shire.</i>           |
| <b>E. Scotland</b>    | <i>Clare Lloyd, 17 Rubislaw Terr., Aberdeen AB1 1XE.</i>                 |
| <b>North Section:</b> | <i>Norman Atkinson, 5 Tolmount Crescent, Montrose.</i>                   |
| <b>Tayside:</b>       | <i>Chris Badenoch, 38 Gala Park, Galashiels.</i>                         |
| <b>South Section:</b> | <i>Bernie Zonfrillo, 28 Brodie Road, Glasgow G21 3SB.</i>                |
| <b>W. Scotland</b>    | <i>to be appointed, contact Bernie Zonfrillo.</i>                        |
| <b>South Section:</b> | <i>Mary Elliott, 153 Howmore, S. Uist.</i>                               |
| <b>O. Hebrides</b>    |                                                                          |

## Scottish Ringers' Conference, 1985

The eleventh in this series of annual events, held on 22-24 November at Middleton Hall near Edinburgh, was hosted by Lothian Ringing Group and so well organised that everything ran to time.

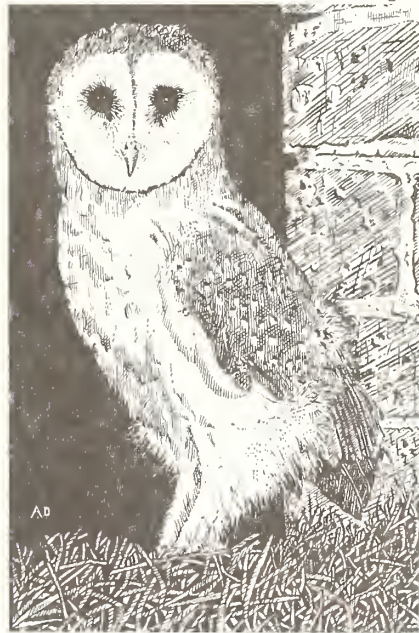
Chris Mead started things going on Friday evening with slides of his recent trip to Zimbabwe, where he made contact with local ringers. Saturday morning began with Ron Summers discussing techniques for studying the population structure of Starling roosts and flocks; these ranged from "whoosh" netting at feeding sites to radar observation of dispersal waves from roosts. Ron's results showed interesting inter-age and inter-sex differences. Ian Poxton described a local study on Ring Ouzels — and dispelled the rumour that ringers were concerned solely with recoveries (although they do provide the occasional bonus to a study!). Many facets were brought together in Brian Little's excellent talk on Goosanders, which told the fascinating story of how the Northumbrian Ringing Group's enthusiasm for this species led from a local breeding study 20 years ago, through an investigation of movements and moult strategies, to international involvement with a flock of 30,000 moulting drakes (representing possibly the entire west European population) off the coast of northern Norway.

After lunch Jim Fowler took us on an enjoyable tour of Leicester Poly's seabird and marine biological monitoring sites in Shetland and emphasised the links between ringers and environmental protection, with oil companies providing much of his group's funding. Several of the techniques available for catching and handling seabirds were illustrated, including a new "finger-down-throat" method for pacifying Fulmars. Proving that amateurs are quite prepared to challenge the professionals, Joe Conner gave a short and clear presentation of his work on the Flanders Moss Lesser Black-backed Gull colony. He compared his results with those from Walney Island, studied professionally by Robin Baker, and showed interesting differences in the wintering ranges of birds from the two colonies. Before the final event of the afternoon — the annual news broadcast from the Ringing Office (presented this year for the first time by Raymond O'Connor) — Stan da Prato described how his interest in breeding warblers had developed into an involvement with the evaluation and conservation of their habitats.

After a behaviourally staggering Saturday night, Sunday opened with slides of steamy, exotic birds as Jeremy Greenwood revealed the results of the "Wet T-shirt" competition he had held with some lucky students in Trinidad. He was, in fact, reporting on the successful field use of a high-level mist net system, the development of which had been described at the 1984 conference. Eric Meek then told us about conservation and public relations problems in Orkney, where the poor breeding success of the Merlin population is causing concern. Alan Heavisides presented an analysis

of Merlin ringing recoveries and showed interesting age- and sex-related differences in dispersal patterns. He also pointed out an encouraging change in mortality trends, with only 5% of ringed Merlins now reported as killed by man compared with 70% fifty years ago. Alan Brown drew together the results of a breeding survey of Lothians' Mute Swans and an eastern Scotland ringing study involving both breeding and moulting birds. In contrast to their English counterparts, eastern Scottish Mute Swans are very mobile. Non-ringers can play an important part in this study by reporting sightings of colour-ringed swans, so please do! However the inherent biases in the reporting of dead ringed birds by members of the public, when applied to Barn Owls at least, can affect the usefulness of the data, as outlined in a presentation by Iain Taylor which led to a lively debate with Raymond O'Connor.

*Tom Dougall*



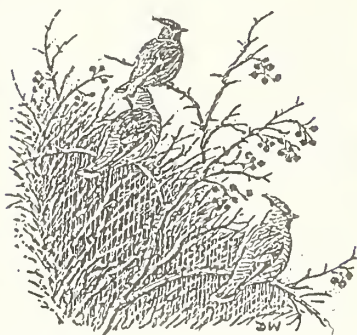
## Art Competition

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation is running its fifth National Wildlife Artist Competition this year, with special prizes for under 18 year olds. The competition is open to both professionals and amateurs; subjects should be based on the sport of shooting, although other natural history subjects will be accepted. Judging will take place in August (in Scotland) and selected entrants will be invited to exhibit their work in London in spring 1987. Further details from, and entries — by 30 June 1986 — to **BASC Scottish Office, Catter House, Drymen by Glasgow**. (Tel. 0360-60840).

## Corpses wanted!

Corpses of the following species are required for analysis of pesticide residues in a monitoring programme, which has been running for the past 20 years: Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine, any rarer raptors, owls, Heron, Kingfisher or Great Crested Grebe. All specimens received are autopsied and analysed for organochlorine and mercury residues; a report is sent to the finder. The scheme is intended to monitor pollutant residues in vulnerable species, and hence to keep a check on the effectiveness of government regulations.

Specimens found dead should be sent, together with date of finding, locality, and circumstances where known, to: **Mrs M. B. Haas, ITE, Monks Wood Experimental Station, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon, Cambs PE17 2LS**. Postage costs will be refunded.



## Birds in Scotland

by VALERIE M. THOM

In the 33 years since Baxter & Rintoul's two volumes, *The Birds of Scotland*, were published much has happened in ornithology generally, and the numbers and distributions of many species have changed, as has much Scottish habitat.

Few can be as well qualified as Valerie Thom (editor of *Scottish Birds* and past-President of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club) to write this replacement of the earlier work and to review the many changes that have taken place and to report on birds in Scotland today. She follows this with the main feature of the book, the species accounts of Scotland's breeding, resident, wintering and passage birds for the period 1950–83, with summaries of earlier data and records of rarities and vagrants 1983–85. The accounts are complemented by 173 species maps, plus many diagrams and tables, and 129 species drawings. There are 32 photographs of changing Scottish landscape and habitat.

390 pages, 26.5 × 19 cm, £24.00 net

## The Sparrowhawk

by IAN NEWTON

Dr Newton's detailed monograph of this widely distributed species is largely the product of 24 years research and fieldwork in SW Scotland. There are 38 drawings by Keith Brockie, over 80 diagrams and a section of photographs.

Coming May 1986

400 pages, 24 × 16 cm, £16.00 net

T & A D POYSER

## Reviews

**The Birds of Australia; A Book of Identification** by K. Simpson and N. Day; Croom Helm; 1985; 352 pp; 129 col plates; many b&w plates; £25. This is a good book; in parts it is a very good book.

The first section comprises a brief discussion on bird families which is especially helpful to the visitor to Australia. The second section, the Field Guide, is the real strength of the book. The format enables the field information, the distribution maps and the coloured drawings to be seen on the same page. "Accidentals" are given the same treatment as the common birds; this may be no bad thing. The illustrations are excellent; they convey a more accurate impression of the bird than any of the numerous other Australian Field Guides. The occasional slip may be forgiven — the wing bar on the Grey-headed Robin is severely underestimated and there is a discrepancy between the text and the illustration of the White-fronted Tern. It is a pity that racial distribution and the times of migration are not mentioned, and that the interpretation of the maps and of the breeding cycles in the third section is not given.

The Handbook section is rather basic, but interesting. Inaccuracies in the text occur, and the use of the imperative tense and of emphasizing italics is irritating. The bibliography is comprehensive and well placed at the end of each group of families. The line drawings are good and make their point.

In a highly competitive field of new books on Australian birds this volume more than holds its own, and is well worth buying.

Betty Rowling

**Confessions of a Scilly Birdman** by D. Hunt; Croom Helm; 1985; 174 pp; 77 b&w illustrations; £8.95.

David Hunt completed this autobiography only weeks before his tragic death in India in February 1985. He gives a frank insight into his life from early childhood in Devon, through school in Norfolk, to spells in the army and at art school, and even a failed attempt at a career as a jazz musician. We also learn of David's later move to the Isles of Scilly, and his subsequent progression from working as a gardener on Tresco, to becoming 'Birder in Residence' on St. Mary's, leading bird tours, and providing information and entertainment for the mass-arrival of enthusiasts each October. Exciting birds appear throughout, but this is more than a blow by blow account of the author's many rarity finds, as David also touches on his wide range of interests outside ornithology. The text is light and entertaining, and is complemented by his own black and white photographs, as well as line drawings by Bryan Bland.

Whether or not you have ever visited Scilly and met David Hunt, you will find plenty to enjoy in this book.

Peter T. Bell

**British Warblers** (New Naturalist No. 71) by Eric Simms; Collins, 1985; 432 pp., 6 colour plates, 177 b&w drawings, figs. and maps, 28 tables; £20. £9.95 (S).

Our warblers are small birds that live in relatively accessible habitats. Most species have striking songs and many undertake prodigious migrations. They are an attractive group to study, especially since the advent of mist nets. Clearly there is a market for a book on warblers, and superficially this one appears to fill the niche for a successor to the last work on all the British species (Howard 1907-14).

Every species on the British list is covered and the Reference Section boasts over 1,000 entries. However, closer inspection reveals some startling omissions. The BTO Guides to Summer Migrants (1981) and to Mould (1983) seem to have been totally ignored as have a number of recent papers, including analyses of the ringing recoveries of Whitethroats and Willow Warblers in *Ringing and Migration*. Too often old material has been reproduced verbatim (eg. maps of ringing recoveries and charts on moult) when much better data sets are now available. "Serious ornithologists" will not appreciate the "statistical" tables which quote measurements without details of how they were measured, do not differentiate between live birds and skins and quote one "average" weight for most species without sample sizes, ranges or the recognition that there can be significant differences due to sex, age or the time of year. *Scottish Birds* is never referred to, which means that the distribution of Lesser Whitethroats, among other things, is well out of date.

The author frequently refers to his own studies, apparently mainly counts of singing birds in a variety of habitats, but the lack of quantitative supporting data makes them hard to evaluate. There are some dubious statements in the text: British Whitethroats are unlikely to reach southern Africa but our Grasshopper Warblers almost certainly do cross the Sahara. My main criticism is more general. The author has amassed a good deal of information but it has not been well integrated. The results from intensive studies are juxtaposed with relatively trivial observations and the book as a whole cries out for a co-author or referee active in some aspect of field research on insectivorous birds who could have channelled Simms' industry and enthusiasm towards a book setting our current knowledge of warblers in a framework of modern ecological and behavioural thinking. The value of this approach can be seen in the same series in the excellent monographs by Ian Newton on Finches and Chris Perrins on Tits.

Finally I must express concern at the direction one of the most famous series in natural history is taking. New Naturalists are now paperbacks with a hardcover available as a "collector's item" at double the price — do only collectors want books that last? Illustrations also seem to have suffered in the interests of economy, with Ian Wallace's paintings looking crushed on too few plates. Photographs are no longer on glossy paper and though Eric Hosking's birds have withstood the change the author's habitat shots too often have not. Page layout combines small type with wasted space in the margins. If a firm as small as Poyser can still produce good hardbacks at reasonable prices why has a giant like Collins lowered its standards?

Stanley da Prato

## Short Reviews

**Where to watch Birds in Kenya** by R. Moore; Transafrica Press, Nairobi; 1982; 229 pp; 23 maps; 21 plates of scenery; 35 line drawings. £9.00.

A Gooders-type guide covering 113 sites in a superb country for birds. Lists of resident birds are given for each site, and routes are suggested for those who wish to hire a car and camp.

**The Travelling Naturalists** by Clare Lloyd; Croom Helm; 1985; 154 pp; 21 colour plates, 52 drawings and photographs; 8 maps; £13.95.

Very readable and short accounts of the travels of the 19th century naturalists Henry Bates, Charles Darwin, Mary Kingsley, Howard Saunders, Henry Seebohm, Charles Waterton and others, with delightful reproductions of plates, etchings and early photographs.

Bill Harper

# BOOKS FOR BIRDWATCHERS

## Shorebirds:

### An Identification Guide to the Waders of the World

by Peter Hayman, John Marchant and Tony Prater

*Shorebirds: An Identification Guide* is designed to provide adequate textual and pictorial information on the whole family of waders. By using this book, wader-watchers will be able to identify shorebirds, not only in terms of species but also by sex, age and racial origin.

The text, by John Marchant and Tony Prater, is the result of thorough, detailed research. The fine and precise colour illustrations of Peter Hayman — who often worked from taxidermists' models for a greater accuracy of plumage sequence — will be of immense value to wader-watchers. There are also maps of breeding and distribution areas, and many additional line drawings.

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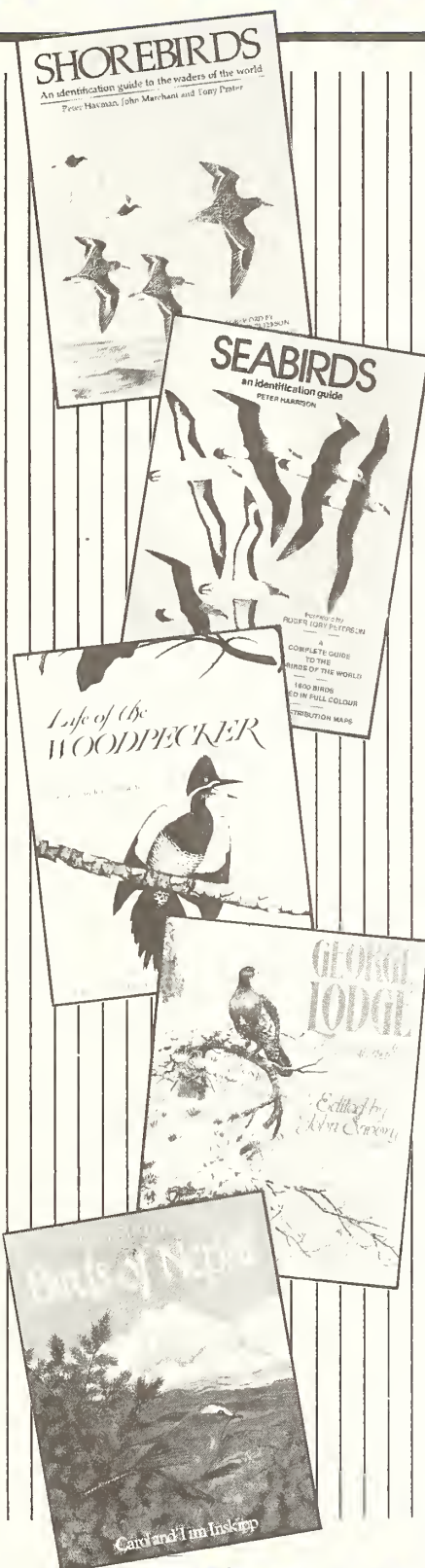
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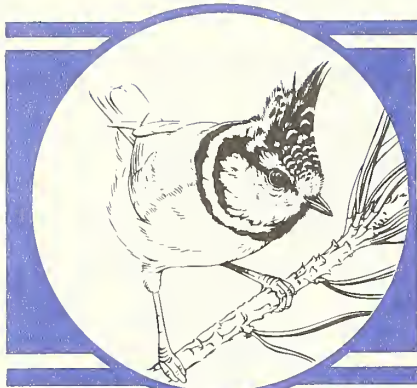
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## Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should preferably reach the Editor no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 April for the June number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries — and suggestions — will be welcomed by the Editor, 19 Braeside Gardens, Perth PH1 1DB (Tel. 0738-23508). Fuller details, and information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in *SB* 13:280-281.

## Small ads

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## SOC Notices

### Jubilee Reception

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club will be celebrated at a Reception to be held in the Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow on the evening of Friday, 21 March, 1986. Besides celebrating 50 years of Scottish ornithology, the Reception will also launch the publication of *Birds in Scotland* by Valerie Thom. The President and Council warmly invite all Club members to the Reception and book launch. Tickets are available from the Glasgow Branch Chairman: Hector Galbraith, 96 Neilston Road, Paisley, Renfrewshire PA2 6EJ, Tel. No. 041-887-5499. Tickets are £5.00 each and include the cost of a buffet and wine.

### Birds in Scotland

The new book by Valerie Thom will be published by T. & A. D. Poyser on 24 March 1986. Details of the special pre-publication offer to SOC members were enclosed with the Winter 1985 issue of *Scottish Birds*. Club members may order the book at the special pre-publication price of £19.00 up to 15th March. Books will be available for collection and signing by Valerie Thom at the Jubilee Reception.

### Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

The Spring One-Day Conference is being held on Saturday, 5 April, 1986 at the Department of Zoology, University of Aberdeen. Speakers include Dr. Ian Newton (ITE) on Sparrowhawks and Dr. Mike Moser (BTO) on the Winter Shorebird Count in Scotland. The SOC Bird Bookshop and BTO Shop will be at the Conference. Places are still available at the conference which costs £9.00 per person, including lunch. The conference programme and booking form is available from Miss Pat Webster, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

### Jubilee Conference

The Annual Conference and AGM will be held the weekend 1-2 November, 1986 at the Marine Hotel, North Berwick, East Lothian. The conference programme and booking form will be included in the September mailing to members.

### Summer Field Trips

Details of the summer field trips organised by the local branches are printed on a separate sheet enclosed with this issue of *Scottish Bird News*.

### 1985 Raffle

Last year raffle ticket sales produced a net profit of £930, (1984, £519; 1983, £771). A total of £1,263 worth of tickets were sold. The cost of printing the books of tickets and the book prizes was £333. We are very grateful to all those who bought and sold tickets. We would particularly like to thank the individuals and companies who donated prizes. This was the last year of the annual raffle, although in future raffles will be held during SOC conferences.

### Roof Repairs

The major, and prolonged, roof repairs to 21 Regent Terrace have been completed. The enshrining scaffolding has gone and the collection of buckets and other rain water receptacles are redundant at last. Hopefully, the second phase of the repair and maintenance programme to the property continues this summer with work on the rear elevation.

### Stirling Branch Jubilee Event

The Stirling Branch Annual General Meeting at the Smith Art Gallery and Museum on April 10th should be the briefest on record, as members (and, we hope, large numbers of their families and friends) will be attending in anticipation of the subsequent "cheese and wine" buffet (Tickets £2.50) and the chance to preview the exhibition set up to illustrate the triple themes of the 50 years of the Club; the (mainly ornithological) activities of the Stirling Branch and its members; and birds and birdwatching in the Stirling area. The exhibition will also feature *Birds in Scotland* and it is hoped to make arrangements for copies of the book to be on sale at the museum shop. The exhibition will continue until April 30th (open 2-5 p.m. Wed.-Fri. and Sun.; 10.30 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat.). Thanks are due to the Museum Curator for making space available and to her staff for assistance and encouragement.

### Photographic Competition

We regret that (owing to a technical hitch!) the winning photographs of 1985 are not reproduced in this edition of *SBN*. Entries for the 1986 competition must reach Regent Terrace by Monday 29 September. As before, both transparencies and black and white prints are acceptable; photographs must be of wild birds in Scotland and be taken within two years of the closing date.

## Stop Press

**Sponsored Bird Watch 1986** (with support from The Famous Grouse Whisky). This event is in aid of the Club's Jubilee Appeal and it is hoped that teams and individuals from all over Scotland will take part. It should be enjoyable and financially rewarding (for the Club!). The date — 10 May; the aim — to see as many species as possible and to obtain sponsorship from friends etc for an agreed sum per species seen. Prizes will be given. Further details and sponsorship forms from Branch Secretaries or 21 Regent Terrace.

**Barbecue** — 8.0 pm on 10 May at Yellowcraig, Dirlerton (off A918). Food provided; bring your own drinks! Names, please, to Liz Leven 031-557-1369 or Willie Prest 031-336-449.

**Fife Bird Club** — recently formed for keen birders. For further information contact: Malcolm Ware 0383-737916 or Douglas Dickson 0592-264787.

**Glasgow Branch Bulletin** is now available for local members. Anyone who has not been able to collect a copy of the December number and wants one should send a SAE to John Sweeney, 44 Newton Avenue, Barrhead, Renfrewshire, G78 2JY.

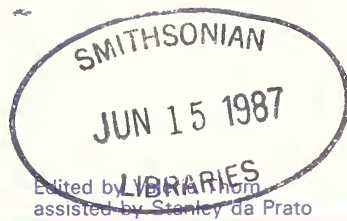


THE SCOTTISH  
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

# Scottish Bird News

June 1986  
ISSN 0268-3199

No. 2



## Transfer of 21

Since 1959 the headquarters of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club have been in 21 Regent Terrace, a Georgian terraced house in Edinburgh's New Town. Up until this year the property was owned by the Fair Isle Observatory Trust and leased to the club. However, on 1 April 1986, FIBOT transferred ownership of the house to the SOC.

It was on Monday, 26th October 1959, that the Earl of Wemyss and March officially opened the Scottish Centre for Ornithology and Bird Protection at 21 Regent Terrace. The Centre became not only the headquarters of the SOC and FIBOT but also the Scottish HQ of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Prior to that, the National Trust for Scotland had provided free office accommodation at 5 Charlotte Square. The move, which actually took place on 7th July, was made possible by an anonymous donation of £4,000 to the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Endowment Trust specifically for the establishment of a Scottish Centre for Ornithology and Bird Protection.

21 Regent Terrace was purchased, for £3,050, and leased to the SOC on a full repairing lease. Two rooms were sub-let to the RSPB. The upper two floors, converted into a flat, were sub-let to George and Irene Waterston. At that time Irene was the Club's Secretary and George the RSPB's Scottish Director. Subsequently, in 1968, the RSPB moved to its own house, four doors away, at 17 Regent Terrace. No. 21 has over the years also been home to the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the World Wildlife Fund (Scotland) and various other voluntary and charitable organisations. In 1981, due to the expansion of the SOC Bird Bookshop, the Club took over all the office accommodation.

The "Calton Hill Scheme" of which Regent Terrace was to be part, was designed by William Playfair in 1818. No. 21 was built around 1830 and occupies a superb position overlooking the Palace of Holyroodhouse and Arthur's Seat. Behind the house lie the 12 acres of Regent Gardens, a private park shared by the residents of the Terrace. In the 19th century the owners of no. 21 included Charles Trotter, "a master upholsterer



employing 100 persons", and his family; and Sir George Harvey, an "historical painter" and a President of the Royal Scottish Academy. The remains of Harvey's studio are still apparent on the top floor. The house is a Grade A Listed Building and is in the Calton Hill Conservation Area.

Besides the Club's offices, no. 21 also houses the SOC Bird Bookshop, arguably the best ornithological bookshop in the world, and the Waterston Library, undoubtedly the best ornithological library in Scotland. It is in the Library that the Council and its committees meet and the Edinburgh Branch has some of its meetings. Other organisations, such as the Isle of May Bird Observatory, also meet here. A survey of the house in 1984 showed that considerable repairs and maintenance were required inside and out. Since then, the property has been replumbed, the electrical wiring inspected and updated where necessary and a major programme of work on the outside begun. Phase 1 entailed substantial repairs to the roof costing over £10,000. Phase 2, on the rear elevation, is in progress. The profits from the SOC Bird Bookshop have provided the money for the work so far.

## Looking ahead

A Golden Jubilee is a good time to look back but it also provides an opportunity to look forward to the next fifty years. From now to the end of the Jubilee Year next March the Council, with as wide a consultation as possible, will be reviewing all the activities of the Club, and trying to ensure that it is providing for the needs and wishes of all bird-watchers in Scotland, including especially the young and active Club members and potential members.

Our publications have been revamped, but are our meetings in the right format, and in the right places? Do we provide enough of the right kind of opportunity to promote and encourage useful and enjoyable field-work? A lot of ideas are being mooted and further suggestions and ideas are very welcome.

To be effective the Club must be on a firm financial basis, and it is in this connection especially that we extend our grateful thanks to the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust for making over the property at 21 Regent Terrace to the Club. It will continue to service FIBOT as well as the SOC, but this move greatly helps us in the costly business of putting what is now our own house in order.

We are keen to establish a satisfactory level of funding for all the Club's activities and later this summer a Jubilee Appeal will be launched, to run through until next March. Some Branches have already started organising fund-raising events, including last month's Sponsored Birdwatch, and this augurs well for our efforts to put the Club on a secure foundation on which to build for the next fifty years.

*John M. S. Arnott*  
President

We are extremely grateful to FIBOT for the transfer of ownership of no. 21 to the SOC in its Jubilee Year. It is an exceptionally generous act on their part. We are also greatly indebted to the anonymous donor who, together with George Waterston's foresight, provided Scotland with a centre for ornithology and the SOC with a home.

*John Davies*

## Ospreys did well in 1985

Despite bad weather, injury and eternal triangles, all of which caused loss of eggs or young, the 1985 total of 53 young fledged was the best on record. Of the 34 pairs known to nest, 28 pairs laid eggs and 22 pairs reared broods successfully, to give an average productivity of 1.56 per occupied nest, the highest figure since 1981 (1.68). The mean brood size was 2.4 and one pair succeeded in raising a brood of four. At one nest the male returned for the eleventh season; two colour-ringed females returned for the sixth season. Thirty-nine young ospreys were ringed and most were also given colour-rings. Artificial eyries were again occupied at some sites.

Recoveries during the last year include two birds shot in Britain on their way south, one caught in fish farm netting and one which died fighting with an eagle beside the Adriatic — the first recovery of a Scottish osprey in Yugoslavia and the eastern Mediterranean.

R. H. Dennis

## Goldeneye success continues

Since colonisation started in 1970 the Goldeneye breeding population has expanded steadily, reaching a record 67 known occupied nests in 1985. Forty-nine of these clutches were incubated and 40 broods, totalling 336+ young, left the nest — an increase of 7 broods and 25 young on the 1984 figures. Average brood size at 8.40 was the lowest since 1980, probably due to the cold, wet summer; fledging success was also thought to be lower than in the last few years.

All but two of the known nests were in boxes. Several were predated, some by squirrel and pine marten, and Jackdaws took over two nests after eggs had been laid. Many more boxes have been erected for the 1986 season, including about 800 provided by the Forestry Commission for use in FC forests from northern Scotland to northern England.

R. H. Dennis

## A Sea Eagle?

*A young Lewis Golden Eagle, whose power of flight had been impaired by repeated drenchings of Fulmar oil, was captured by means of a salmon 'tailer' (a wire noose used by anglers to bring salmon ashore by the tail), lashed to a bamboo pole. During intensive care to remove the oil, the bird escaped and was recaptured with a salmon landing net!*

Peter Cunningham

## Hooded Crow caching fish scraps

Food caching is well known amongst some crows, particularly Jays and Nutcrackers, but has only rarely been documented in Hooded Crows though I suspect it is more regular than realised.

On 26 March 1984 a pair of Hooded Crows fed in the vicinity of the fish market and piers at Scalloway, Shetland. For 20 minutes they worked through the area, feeding on small scraps of fish. One bird ate every item it found whereas the other ate some but stored a total of three items in different places, always within full view of the other bird. The piece of fish was placed under a small stone within 5m of the place of discovery and a small cairn of stones or wood fragments was then built around the item. At the time the harbour area was quiet, in contrast to the frenzied activity during trawler landings, when thousands of gulls capitalised on the fish offal and discards. Fish landings are often rather unpredictable, and when they occur Hooded Crows appear to be subordinate to the large gulls, usually scavenging after most gulls have departed. Thus food caching could guarantee a food supply in the harbour area during periods of food scarcity. An interesting difference from other studies was that this individual made no attempt to hide its activities from the second bird, which may well have been the mate. In Canada, Northwestern Crows feeding on intertidal prey store items amongst grass nearby, for retrieval at high water, but both on territories and in other areas, if another crow is nearby the caching bird either waits until the conspecific has left, or eats the food immediately.

Peter J. Ewins

## Buzzard taking Teal

On 24 November 1985, at Milngavie Reservoir, I saw a Buzzard take a Teal by virtually dropping down on it and carrying it off. The Teal looked healthy and did not lag behind the main flock, which had taken off, along with Mallard, Wigeon, Tufted Duck and Pochard, when the Buzzard appeared and gave the characteristic 'mewing' call. The weather at the time was not unduly hard and visibility was good. I understand that wildfowl have seldom been recorded as prey of Buzzards.

D. Kenney

*BWP states that where small mammals are not available birds may be main prey; examples of prey species given include Jackdaw, Woodpigeon and Puffin but no mention is made of wildfowl. It would be interesting to hear of any other records similar to Mr Kenney's. Eds.*

## A 'rarity' revealed

"Contractors in remote areas of the Lammermuir Hills found the nesting site of one species of warbler which was thought to be the only site in the country." Readers of the *Scotsman*, intrigued by this statement from the South of Scotland Electricity Board describing their concern for the environment when building the power line from Torness nuclear power station, can find the real story in SB 11:108-112 & 13:203-216. The warbler in question is the Lesser Whitethroat, which does not nest on heathery hillsides, but in the scrub at Hadfast Valley, Cousland, and adjacent lowland sites in the Lothians.

The Hadfast site, which has held Lesser Whitethroats since 1974, as well as a rich variety of other songbirds, is owned by SSEB who have planted two pylons in clearings cut from scrub. Unfortunately some of this work *did* take place in the nesting season but, in the longer term, the pylons may save the site from the more serious threat of infilling with ash from Cockerzie power station. Local ornithologists are hopeful that SSEB's interest in conservation will lead to a long term reserve agreement with the Scottish Wildlife Trust. In the meantime anyone keen to see, or hear, Lesser Whitethroats will find it easier to locate them on May mornings along East Lothian District Council's Pencaitland Railway Walk, which is marked on most maps of the area.

Stan da Prato

## Scone Palace Superbirds?

"The 30 resident peafowl lay an average of six chicks each, so about 180 young birds are thought to have been killed by the weather . . . . Peacock, a feature of the palace's banquet menu, will not be available this year due to the reduced stock."

Dundee Courier 29/3/86

## Snow-bathing Magpie

During the recent cold spell (24.2.86) at 3.35pm, an adult Magpie (sex unknown) was observed throwing snow over its back with its wings and beak. The bird also pushed its head into the snow, raised it exposing a head full of snow, then shook itself. This performance was repeated several times and lasted for approximately 3 minutes. The moral might be: if you can't find water to bathe in — improvise! The event took place outside my office window at Roslin, Midlothian. The weather was overcast but not snowing at the time. Is this a common form of behaviour for Magpies?

M. H. Maxwell

# Recent Reports

These notes cover the period January to March; they include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record, nor will they be indexed. Please send reports to **Pete Ellis, Houss, East Burra, Shetland**, via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December.

The late winter was very quiet for rare birds and early spring migrants were few and far between. The award for the most optimistic bird of the period must go to the farm-yard duck which reached Fair Isle in March.

**White-billed Divers** were reported off two ferries in Shetland and more unusually from Cramond on the Forth. There were 8 **Red-necked Grebes** and a **Black-necked Grebe** at Musselburgh in February and a **Manx Shearwater** off Peterhead on 1st January. A **Bewick's Swan** was in East Lothian and 4 **Bean Geese** in Shetland, with 6 colour-ringed birds at Tarradale. **Snow Geese** were reported from the Ythan and at least 2 birds in the Lothians. Four **Canada Geese** at Strathbeg were followed by 10 more at Mintlaw. There was a notable influx of **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** in Aberdeenshire, with 85 at Fraserburgh on 14th February, 72 at Peterhead the following day and 83 on the Ythan. Fifty-five were also seen at Eyemouth on 14th February and 50 at Aberlady the next day. A **Green-winged Teal** was in Shetland from February when the **Black Duck** reappeared at Tynninghame. Orkney's **Red-crested Pochard** also returned. Shetland had a flock of over 500 **Long-tailed Ducks** in south Yell Sound and at least 5 **Surf Scoters** were on the Forth. Single

red-head **Smew** were at Girdleness, Davan, Tynninghame, Musselburgh and Linlithgow, with 2 at Strathbeg. A **Red Kite** was seen in Caithness and an immature **Sea Eagle** was in Shetland in March. The first **Osprey** was back in the Highlands on 13th March. Strathbeg had an **Avocet** in January when 3 **Greenshank** were at Tynninghame. **Grey Phalaropes** were seen at Gullane and Hound Point in February and off South Ronaldsay in March. A few **Pomarine Skuas** wintered, with 6 in the Beaully Firth, 1 at Peterhead and 4 at South Queensferry. Single **Arctic Skuas** were at Musselburgh and Hound Point and a **Bonxie** was also at Musselburgh on 1st February, with the first returning bird off Fair Isle on 28th March. **Mediterranean Gulls** were at Aberdeen and Stranraer and a **Little Gull** passed Hound Point in February. Single **Ring-billed Gulls** visited Doonfoot and Stranraer also in February. "White gulls" were still scarce, Orkney had 2 **Iceland Gulls** as did Aberdeenshire and Banff again had a **Kumlien's Gull**. Fraserburgh came top of the **Glaucous Gull** league with 7 birds, 5 were at Peterhead, 4 at Musselburgh and Lerwick only managed 3. If things carry on as they are Shetland will soon be relegated from the "good gulls league". A very early **Sandwich Tern** which passed North Ronaldsay on 28th March may have been the tern seen off Fair Isle on 17th March. There were a few **Little Auks** around, with 3 in Shetland, 3 dead in the Moray Firth and 5 alive and 10 dead in the Forth in February. Shetland had at least 6 **Long-eared Owls** with 5 at Aberlady and at least 1 **Snowy Owl** on Unst in the late winter.

A **Kingfisher** reached Shetland on 12th

March, the same day as a **Bearded Seal** (you won't find that in your bird books). Fair Isle had a new spring record of 750 **Skylarks** on 12th March. Scandinavian **Rock Piptits** (*littoralis*) were trapped at Burnmouth and Barns Ness in January. Small numbers of **Waxwings** occurred in the north isles and several east coast counties, including 7 in Kirkwall and a total of 42 in Aberdeenshire, the maximum being 12 at Dyce. Fair Isle had a **Black-bellied Dipper** in March for the fourth successive year. A **Stonechat** was on Unst on 17th March when there was also a very early **Wheatear**, with another on Sanday the same day. Small numbers of **Blackcaps** wintered in the Lothians along with at least 1 **Chiffchaff**. Two **Great Tits** were in Stromness in February. Two **Great Grey Shrikes** were on North Ronaldsay in February, with others at Loch Garten and Stonehaven. Several large flocks of **Brambling** were reported, including 200 at Threipmuir and Darent House, 320 at Broughton, 350 at Bothwell and 800 at East Hermiston. One hundred **Twite** were seen at Dalmeny. The largest flock of **Mealy Redpolls** reported was 40 at Strand in Shetland. The **Two-barred Crossbill** remained in the Carron Valley and a party of 15 **Common Crossbills** were on Hoy. **Lapland Buntings** were on Fair Isle, at Deerness, with 3 at Greg Ness and a maximum of 17 at Aberlady. One hundred and twenty **Snow Buntings** were at Threipmuir in January and 500 were at Peterhead in February. Wintering **Little Buntings** were at Tarradale and Inverness. A flock of 300 **Corn Buntings** was seen at Collieston.

Pete Ellis

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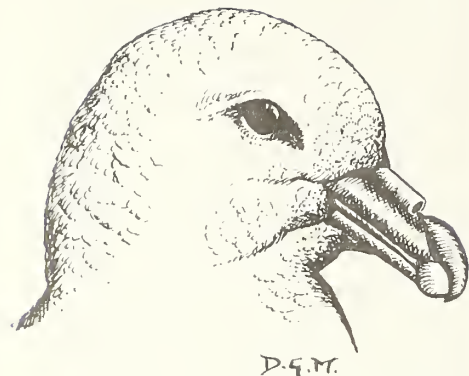
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# The Orkney Ringing Group

Much interesting and valuable work on birds is currently being carried out by the various ringing groups and we plan to feature this in a series of articles in *Scottish Bird News*. Although all employ the same main techniques, each of the groups has its own particular emphasis and 'target species'. In this first article in the series Eric Meek, RSPB Orkney Officer, describes the history and activities of the Orkney group.



Bird ringing in Orkney goes back to 1950, when Robert Carrick and George Dunnet began their studies of the Fulmar on Eynhallow, an island to which they were introduced by local ornithologist George Arthur. Aberdeen University students still visit the island to ring nestlings and monitor the breeding success of marked birds. Much of what is now known about Fulmar biology has stemmed from this important project, which was strongly supported in its early days by members of the Orkney Field Club, who helped by ringing large numbers of pulli Fulmars elsewhere in the islands.

An early convert to ringing as a tool for studying bird populations was native Orcadian Eddie Balfour. From 1944 to 1974 he systematically studied the Hen Harrier population of the Orkney moors, becoming particularly interested in the birds' polygynous habits. To establish relationships between individual birds, Balfour initially used plumage abnormalities but later graduated to using colour-rings, then leg-jesses and eventually wing-tags. This study, taken over in 1975 by Nick Picozzi of ITE, has resulted in a series of papers (mainly in *Ornis Scandinavica*).



## Small isle expeditions

A further chapter in the development of ringing in Orkney began in 1971, when Andrew Ramsay paid his first visit to Auskerry. With the enthusiastic support of the owner, Simon Brogan, ADKR has visited the island in July most years since, a commitment which has resulted in the marking of some 8000 seabirds there. Some 50% of the ringing total have been Storm Petrels — Auskerry holds an Order 4 breeding colony.

Sule Skerry, a more remote island, has been the target, since 1975, of several expeditions led by Adrian Blackburn and Dave Budworth. Although a variety of seabirds have been ringed and studied, the principal aim has been to investigate the Puffin population. Transects have revealed that up to 44,000 pairs may breed, and up to 10,000 have been ringed on a single visit!

## Mist-nets and migrants

The mid 1970s saw further professional involvement in ringing with a study of Great Black-backed Gulls by Mark Beaman, based at Aberdeen University's Culterty Field Station. This period also saw much ringing by individual amateurs such as Chris Booth and Jim Williams, while Andrew Ramsay, his appetite whetted by Auskerry, became resident in Orkney and took it upon himself to train a number of local and 'immigrant' bird-watchers in the art of ringing. During the late 1970s the total numbers of birds ringed in the islands, particularly those caught by mist-netting, rose appreciably.

Mist-netting has always been the chief means of catching birds for ringing on North Ronaldsay, at Orkney's north-eastern extremity. This prime migrant spot had been visited by ringers since the early 1960s. In 1977 Kevin Woodbridge became the island's GP and, being a ringer himself, was able to provide much more complete coverage. Most trapping is done in the walled garden of Holland House, where dense cover exerts a magnetic attraction upon arriving migrants. The island's connection with ringing now goes much deeper because here, in the Community Centre, the local folk make up the BTO's famous North Ronaldsay mist-nets from material imported from Japan. In the future North Ronaldsay may also benefit from the establishment of a bird observatory, plans for which are currently afoot.

## Ringing Group benefits

From 1980 onwards most of the ringers resident in Orkney came together in the Orkney Ringing Group. Originally a loose amalgam, the group became more tightly knit in 1983 and began to operate a communal ring stock. This type of organisation has greatly benefited those involved, in terms of being able to mount joint schemes and to attract grant aid.

One group member, E. J. Williams, has specialised in the ringing of Red-throated Divers, using and adapting the techniques developed by Dave Okill in Shetland. With a catch of 49 in 1985, Orkney now accounts for about one-third of the Red-throats ringed in Britain each year. The present author has specialised in studies of raptors, especially Hen Harriers and Merlins. An attempt has been made each year to locate a large enough sample of successful nests to keep up the run of data on breeding success, currently very poor in the case of the Merlin.

## Waders galore

All group members participate in the ringing of wader pulli, the annual total of up to 750 indicating that, despite the loss of much prime habitat to agricultural 'improvements', Orkney is still a rich area for these species. Lapwings are studied by Mildred Cuthbert, while John and Bobby McCutcheon are trying their luck with Ringed Plovers. The outstanding wader in the Orkney context, however, is the Curlew which, with breeding densities greater than anywhere else in Britain and a wintering population of perhaps 20,000+, is surely crying out for attention!

Mention of wintering waders necessitates acknowledgement of the important contribution of the Tay Ringing Group to their study in Orkney. In the winters of 1982/83 and 1983/84, members of the Tay RG, with help from the Orkney RG, surveyed virtually the whole of the Orkney coastline (apart from cliff sections) and counted the birds, especially the waders, utilising this habitat. The final wader total was a staggering 51,339 birds of 16 species! The Tay ringers also introduced the Orkney group to the use of a mini cannon-net and, in the winter of 1984/85, with the aid of an SOC Endowment Fund grant, we began to operate such a net in the islands. Colin Corse, our group chairman, is the licence holder, having gained his cannon-netting

experience with Aberdeen University and the Highland Ringing Group. Whilst all shore waders are caught, the principal target is the Purple Sandpiper, a species difficult to catch by any other means and which is, at present, proving to be a challenge in terms of elucidating the migrations of the various populations.

The small Orkney Swallow population has been studied by Jim Williams and Bob Adam, while Chris Booth has been looking in detail at Ravens on the Orkney Mainland. Lister Hogarth, another of our 'A' ringers, has concentrated on roost-netting, particularly of Blackbirds and Starlings. An interesting finding concerning Starlings is that a proportion of the Orkney wintering population comes north from breeding areas in the south of Scotland and northern England.

### *Terns and Tysties*

Upon the formation of the Orkney Ringing Group the major opportunity for increased ringing activity was seen to be among seabirds. Marking large numbers of seabirds can, however, prove to be exceedingly expensive, so an approach was made to Occidental Petroleum (Caledonia) Ltd., the oil company running the terminal on Flotta. Generous grant aid towards the purchase of rings has been made available by Occidental for the last three years and we acknowledge that much of our seabird ringing programme would be impossible without this help.

In Orkney the ledge-nesting auks, prime target of other seabird ringers, are often inaccessible. However, we have been able to specialise in one species little ringed else-

where, the Tystie. Over 200 pulli are now marked each year, especially in the major colony on the Holm of Papay; in this connection the hard work and nest-finding expertise of newly-qualified 'A' ringer Martin Gray deserves special mention. Another of our specialities is the Arctic Tern. With an Orkney breeding population of some 33,000 pairs it is not surprising that, in a good season, we have been able to ring almost 3000 chicks. Our moorlands and maritime heaths hold probably a quarter of all Britain's breeding Common Gulls but, despite our annual ringing total of up to 1500, the recovery rate is so low that their movements remain something of a mystery. Up to 1600 Great Black-backs a year are ringed and biometric data were collected from a sample of chicks in 1985, as they were from samples of Herring Gulls, Arctic Skuas and Great Skuas. All four species are sandeel feeders and the data are being used by Bob Furness for a comparison of the condition of Orkney chicks with those in Shetland, where industrial fishing of sandeels takes place.

Finally, although North Ronaldsay is Orkney's answer to Fair Isle in terms of migrant watching and ringing, it does not have a complete monopoly of 'good' birds. The list of oddities handled on other islands, especially the Mainland and South Ronaldsay, in recent years includes Tengmalm's Owl, Scops Owl, Common Nighthawk, Thrush Nightingale, Blyth's Reed, Subalpine, Greenish, Arctic, Pallas's, Radde's and Tennessee Warblers and Arctic Redpoll. Not a bad haul and certainly enough to keep the enthusiasm from flagging even in the teeth of an Orkney hurricane!

*Eric Meek*



## Birds in Scotland

by VALERIE M. THOM

In the 33 years since Baxter & Rintoul's two volumes, *The Birds of Scotland*, were published much has happened in ornithology generally, and the numbers and distributions of many species have changed, as has much Scottish habitat.

Few can be as well qualified as Valerie Thom (editor of *Scottish Birds* and past-President of the Scottish Ornithologists's Club) to write this replacement of the earlier work and to review the many changes that have taken place and to report on birds in Scotland today. She follows this with the main feature of the book, the species accounts of Scotland's breeding, resident, wintering and passage birds for the period 1950-83, with summaries of earlier data and records of rarities and vagrants 1983-85. The accounts are complemented by 173 species maps, plus many diagrams and tables, and 129 species drawings. There are 32 photographs of changing Scottish landscape and habitat.

390 pages, 26.5 x 19 cm, £24.00 net

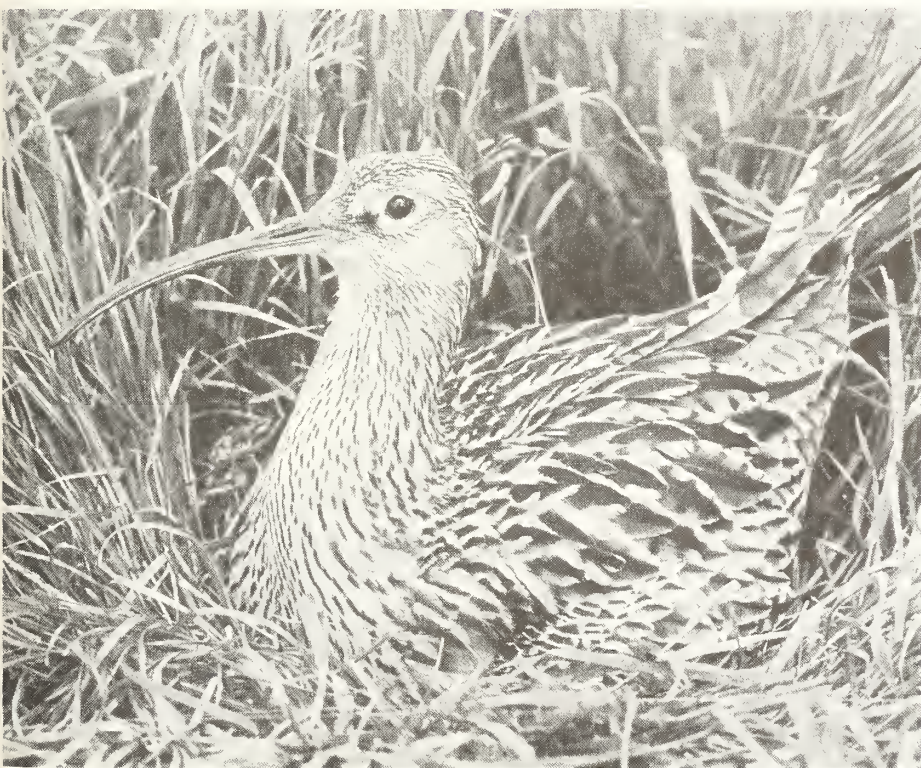
## The Sparrowhawk

by IAN NEWTON

Dr Newton's detailed monograph of this widely distributed species is largely the product of 24 years research and fieldwork in SW Scotland. There are 38 drawings by Keith Brockie, over 80 diagrams and a section of photographs.

400 pages, 24 x 16 cm, £16.00 net

T & A D POYSER



*Curlew at the nest. B. S. Turner*



## Photospot

*Bobby Smith's striking photo of a Swift in flight was taken with a motorised Hasselblad, triggered automatically. He used a Zeiss 80mm Sonnar lens, Ilford FP4 film and a shutter speed of 1/500 at f8; the distance from subject to camera was 2-2½m.*

## SOC News

### Jubilee Reception and Launch

Fifty years ago a group of voluntary amateur ornithologists held the first meeting of the then newly formed Scottish Ornithologists' Club; on March 21st, 1986, we celebrated our golden jubilee. It gave very real pleasure to see so many SOC stalwarts who had made the long journey to Glasgow on such a wintry night. Ian Munro, one of the founding fathers, was there and there was an unique assembly of eight past presidents, whose joint terms of office spanned nearly half of the club's existence.

A buffet supper was enjoyed in the reconstructed natural history concourse of the Kelvingrove Museum, home of the Glasgow Branch of the SOC for many years. The food and drink were good and plentiful; the speeches were good and to the point; the friendly spirit which has been the hallmark of the SOC was much in evidence.

The focus of the celebration was the launch of 'Birds in Scotland', written by Valerie Thom and published for the club by Trevor and Anna Poyser. John Arnott recalled the club's early days and reflected on the changes in

ornithology and land use which demanded an up-to-date and authoritative account of the status of birds in Scotland. He congratulated Valerie and everyone else concerned with the production of this splendid book. It was also a happy opportunity to see the original illustrations which represented the varied styles of contemporary Scottish bird artists.

The air of warmth and informality which marked the evening was a tribute to the care which went into its preparation. Our thanks go to everyone who was involved.

*Ivan T. Draper*

### Aberdeen Branch — Jubilee Dinner

Thirty-six members and friends attended a Dinner, held in Aberdeen University's Central Refectory on 28 February, 1986, to mark the Club's Golden Jubilee. As our guests, with their wives, we had Professor V. C. Wynne-Edwards, CBE, FRS, FRSE, Honorary President and founder Chairman of the Aberdeen Branch, and Mr Sandy Anderson, an Honorary Member and past Chairman of the Branch. Following an excellent meal, Branch Chairman Iain Macleod introduced our two guests, in turn.

Professor Wynne-Edwards gave us a fascinating insight into the early days of the

Club, describing his involvement with George Waterston in the formation of the Branch here in Aberdeen. He recalled the visits of 'the good ladies' Evelyn V. Baxter and Leonora J. Rintoul, then joint Presidents of the SOC, to Aberdeen, the Club's first weekend Conference, again in Aberdeen, and the Devonian Cruise of 1966, an event which he considered to be the pinnacle of George and Irene Waterston's achievements. In conclusion, he quoted what he believed to be the secret of the SOC: "The SOC has always had something which makes it very popular with people from elsewhere and I believe the secret is that the meetings to which outsiders come are residential meetings and they are not only edifying and uplifting and so on, but they are also convivial. This has always been so in my experience and it continues to this day and I believe this is quite an exceptional Society."

Sandy Anderson took for his theme 'Misty Islands', recalling firstly a working holiday on Eynhallow. The boatman, who lived on another island needed a haircut, tempting Sandy to do the job with offers of 'home brew'. Sandy and his party were duly taken over to the boatman's house where the haircut was performed, the party all the while partaking of the home brew, so potent that it could only be quelled as it came out of the bottle by throwing Abernethy biscuits at it! A fog came down on the return boat trip, but much to Sandy's surprise, they fetched up on Eynhallow at exactly the right spot. The Fulmar count that afternoon was the lowest in 38 years! An SOC trip to the Bell Rock lighthouse was also recalled, sailing through thick mist all the way from Arbroath. Suddenly, the lighthouse appeared and round it flew a solitary Greylag Goose. This was duly noted before they headed back to Arbroath.

Both speakers found the Branch in good heart and expressed the hope that our successors in 2036 should also find it so.

*David Bain*

### The Scottish Birdwatcher's Conference — April 1986

Two hundred members and friends from all over the country met in Aberdeen University's Zoology Department on Saturday 5 April, for a One Day Conference, organised jointly by the SOC and BTO. Professor V. C. Wynne-Edwards, CBE, FRS, FRSE, Honorary President of the SOC and founder Chairman of the Aberdeen Branch, opened the Conference. The lectures, all of particular relevance to Scotland, covered a wide range of subjects.

## Sparrowhawks and Merlins

Dr Ian Newton, of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, gave a most interesting and informative account of his Sparrowhawk studies, carried out mainly in Dumfries-shire. His investigations into the factors affecting the species' breeding success have yielded a great deal of data. It was interesting to learn that within 24 hours of hatching, female chicks are already heavier than their male siblings and that the weight gap continues to increase right up to fledging, despite the fact that chicks of both sexes receive the same amount of food. If the content of his lecture was anything to go by, Dr Newton's forthcoming monograph on the Sparrowhawk should be well worth reading.

Next, Aberdeen Branch member Graham Rebecca spoke of his investigations into the status and distribution of the Merlin in Grampian. Assisted by a small number of local members, Graham has built up a detailed record of breeding territories, mainly on Deeside. These are now being monitored to yield base-line data, which in turn will enable the effects of changing land use to be evaluated. Already a comprehensive set of data has been collected, on nest sites, nest and chick predation, nest failure, prey items and the continuing effects of pesticides.

## Mute Swans and Martins

Besides determining the number of breeding pairs of Mute Swan in Angus, Norman Atkinson's study has also established the origins of the large number of these birds which appear on Montrose Basin and the lower Esk to moult. The moulting birds come from the south and west, from as far as Cumbria and Northumbria. Blood samples taken from these birds have, with a few exceptions, shown a much lower level of lead than found in more southerly populations.

Dr David Bryant of Stirling University kicked off the afternoon session with a talk on the 'Success, failure and disaster in the lives of Swallows and Martins'. His studies of the House and Sand Martin have shown that both species have become smaller since the Sahel disaster. House Martins are now 1 gram lighter than they were 10 years ago and the sternum length in Sand Martins is 0.2mm shorter. "Evolution while you watch", he claimed.

## Whitefront ringing

Dr Tony Fox of the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study spoke on the wintering areas used by these birds. Darvic ringing of the birds in West Greenland — difficult enough in itself due to the low breeding densities — has shown that the birds regularly return to the same wintering areas. These are located in parts of the country which are least affected by frost, since the principal food of the species is cotton grass. The birds pull up the plant, to reach the rich concentration of carbohydrates in the lower stem. Birds which breed furthest north winter furthest south, the southerly breeding birds having a shorter migration flight to winter at a more northerly latitude. With a maximum population of 16,000 birds in 1979, and juveniles comprising only 13% of this number, conservation of British and Irish wintering grounds is paramount.

## Shetland studies

Peter Ewins gave an account of his 3 year study of the Tystie in Shetland, aimed at

obtaining base-line information on the ecology of the species and its distribution both within and outwith the breeding season. Tysties are uniformly distributed around the Shetland islands, breeding on cliffs if rats are present but choosing boulder fields where rats are absent. They feed within 1km of the shore and sandeels comprise more than 50% of their food. The birds disperse to traditional areas within the archipelago to moult, obtaining shelter from equinoctial gales amongst the many islands.

The Whimbrel in Shetland is on the southern limit of its breeding range. Dr Mike Richardson's study of the species was aimed at establishing its status and distribution, habitat preferences and the implications for its conservation. The birds show a marked preference for serpentine heathland, habitat which is being reclaimed at an ever increasing rate, thanks to large agricultural grants now available. The birds prefer to breed in small groups, up to 10 pairs, usually with Arctic Tern, Common Gull or Arctic Skua nearby.

## Winter shorebirds

The concluding lecture was given by Dr Mike Moser of the BTO, on the Winter Shorebird Count in Scotland. This has enabled the important sections of our coastline to be identified, providing much data which will be of use in advising planning authorities and government committees concerned with coastal development.

Dr Jeremy Greenwood, SOC Vice-president, closed the Conference with a hearty vote of thanks to the Speakers, Organisers and the University for the use of their facilities. The venue for next year's One Day Conference will be Glasgow.

As is usual with 'gatherings ornithological', the day was too short for all that had to be heard and said! Some felt that there was insufficient time for informal conversation. This need might be satisfied by arranging an informal social for the evening after the Conference, another feature sought by some in Aberdeen on Saturday. Conference organisers, please note!

David Bain

## New Galloway Weekend

For our first celebration of Jubilee Year, on 22-23 February, we had two wonderful days in the field, with snow-clad hills, ice-covered lochs and ice floes in the rivers, all bathed in cold, bright sunshine. The geese rose in thousands — Greylag, Pinkfeet, Barnacle and Greenland Whitefronts. Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Peregrine, Buzzard and Kestrel delighted our party. When lucky enough to come across flocks of small birds, we were rewarded by unsurpassed views of Reed Buntings, Yellowhammers, Chaffinches, Bramblings, Skylarks and Linnets. The waders on the ice-rimmed shore were Grey and Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whaup, Dunlin, Knot, Ringed Plover, Purple Sandpiper, Greenshank, Redshank, etc. The Oystercatchers were in uncountable numbers. In all, 83 species were seen.

Unfortunately, the snow to the north, south and east caused cancellations from club members outwith Galloway. But the brave and hardy few who arrived from Glasgow and Bedford had a memorable weekend. I think George Waterston must have put in a good word for us up there!

Helen Halliday

## Stirling Branch Argyll Weekend

This year's weekend (28 February - 2 March) was spent near Ormsary, beside Loch Caolisport. The typical west coast sea loch birds were viewable from the firesides of our beautifully situated and very comfortable chalets (comfortable that is except for the one with the frozen plumbing!).

There is only one word for the weather — superb. We caught the last days of the 'blocking anticyclone'; clear air, sharp frosts, a powdering of snow on the Paps of Jura, but almost a touch of spring in the afternoon sun. Conditions were less than ideal for the birds, though; with almost all standing water, some rivers and even marine shallows iced over, wildfowl were scarce except at Rhunahaorine. Two members set off for Islay on the Saturday and finished up on Gigha, where they found some of the ducks frozen out of the mainland. On Sunday the intrepid pair did manage the Islay sail, again filling in a piece of the jigsaw by finding good numbers of divers well out in the Sound of Jura.

Another couple surprised a Peregrine plucking a Woodcock, which had presumably been forced by the frost to show itself in the open. Many passerines were adopting desperate foraging methods, with stranded seaweed and tideline debris providing a larder for Stonechats, Redwings, Robins, Reed Buntings and even a Goldfinch. Between us we saw 92 species but my own 'most memorable moment' involved not birds but the opportunity to watch an otter hunting and feeding at the edge of the sea near Danna Island.

As a footnote, we should remind readers that, although organised by the Stirling Branch, this is an SOC weekend. Not many years ago we were regularly joined by members from other Branch areas — new faces are always welcome and, up to a point, the more people the cheaper per head the accommodation!

D. Thorogood

## 'Local birds' video project

Dave Thomson, a Dundee Branch member, is planning to produce a video based on members' photographs of local birds. This enterprising project should provide useful material for educational purposes — maybe other Branches might follow suit?

### Jeremy Woodward

Regular attenders at SOC Conferences will be saddened to learn that Jeremy died suddenly and tragically in late March. For many years he had voluntarily undertaken the duties of 'bell-ringer and whipper-in' at our conferences, playing an important part in ensuring that things started on time. We will miss his cheery smile and warm welcome. Our sincere sympathy goes to his wife, Margaret, and family.

V.M.T.

# Numbers of wild geese in Britain, 1985-86

Each autumn and winter the majority of the populations of wild geese which come to Britain for the winter are censused. As well as counts of actual numbers, estimates are made of the proportion of young birds in the flocks. This assessment of the annual breeding success is not only very useful in helping to interpret changes in numbers, but additionally tells us what kind of summer it has been in those regions of the arctic where our wintering geese breed. From the evidence obtained last autumn, the summer of 1985 was clearly a rather mixed one, with good weather in the western arctic (as we look at it), rather poor in the middle, but getting better towards the east.

## Greenland white-fronts

The Greenland White-fronted Goose benefited from a fine summer. Visitors to West Greenland last year reported long sunny days (and nights) from areas where it is much more usual to have cool spells and quite a lot of rain. The results of the annual census are not yet to hand, the principal count being held at the end of March, but it seems virtually certain that this population now exceeds 20,000, the highest for many years, though still below the estimated population of the 1950s. The proportion of young in the flocks on Islay last autumn was over 25%, the highest on record there, and the total counted in November was a record, too, at over 6,300. However, this peak was short-lived, numbers being back to a more usual 4000-5000 by December, the extra birds having presumably moved on to Ireland.



## Greenland Barnacles

East Greenland clearly had a much less good summer than West, or at least

## BARNACLE GOOSE



it may have started too late for the Barnacle Geese there to take full advantage of it. There were only 10.7% young in the Islay flocks in November, close to the average. The monthly counts carried out on Islay through the winter produced a November-December peak of 19,000, dropping to about 17,500 thereafter. The remainder of this population winters in small scattered flocks, the majority of them on uninhabited islands, from Co. Kerry in south-west Ireland to islands off the north coast of Sutherland, plus one haunt in Orkney. Counting is only possible from the air, and the last full census was in April 1983. At that time the population totalled 25,000. Numbers on Islay have risen a little since then and it is likely that the total is closer to 30,000, though still below the peak of 33,800 reached in 1978.

## Spitsbergen Barnacles

Moving east in the arctic brings one to Svalbard (Spitsbergen). This is the breeding home for the Solway population

Malcolm Ogilvie was, until very recently, Senior Research Officer at the Wildfowl Trust and responsible, among other things, for goose censuses. He has just left to become Director of the Islay Field Centre, a new venture set up on the island.

of Barnacle Geese. It was known that they had returned north last spring in only average to poor condition, as the cold April had delayed the vital growth of grass around the Solway on which the geese depend to build up their reserves. Similarly, the weather had continued cool during May when the birds were staging in northern Norway. The 9.6% young which they brought back to Caerlaverock in the autumn was therefore not altogether unexpected and was only barely enough to maintain numbers, with a peak count of 10,400, compared with 10,500 the previous winter.

## Pinkfeet

Pink-footed Geese breed in East Greenland, too, though principally in central Iceland. Their breeding success was not as good as might have been expected from the reports of holiday-makers sun-bathing on Iceland's north coast, so it may be that the cold spring had too great a deterrent effect for the geese to be able to benefit from the better conditions which followed. The breeding success was only 13.4%, slightly below average, though enough to lift the population to a new record of 128,000 at the time of the mid-November census. The proportion of these in Scotland (85%) was the highest for several years due to the very bad harvest

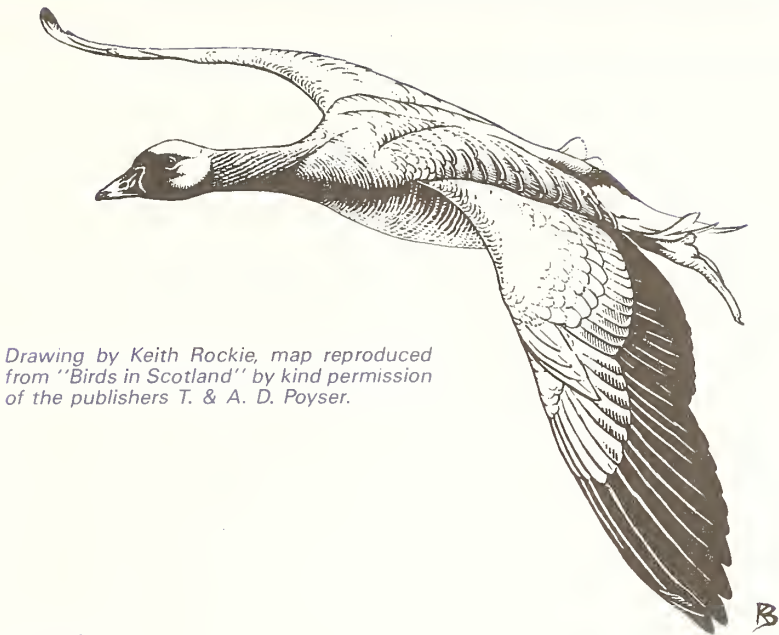
## PINK-FOOTED GOOSE



leaving masses of spilt grain in the fields. The much cleaner harvests of recent times, coupled with the immediate ploughing and re-sowing with winter barley, has had the effect of pushing the geese further south into Lancashire and down as far as The Wash quite early in the winter, where formerly it took cold weather to do this. One completely unharvested field of oats north of Dundee was still supporting about 5000 geese as late as mid-March.

### Greylags

The Iceland-breeding Greylags also had a below-average breeding season, with only 11.2% young, though enough to produce a new record total of 107,000. For both this and the last species, it is difficult to be certain by how much the population has actually increased because the November 1984 census was seriously disrupted by bad weather and the totals obtained then were certainly too low. The Greylags' distribution at the time of the November 1985 census also showed the influence of the bad harvest with much greater numbers than usual in the northern part of Scotland, and correspondingly fewer in the south and in northern England.



*Drawing by Keith Rockie, map reproduced from "Birds in Scotland" by kind permission of the publishers T. & A. D. Poyser.*

### Other species

The westernmost breeding geese coming to Britain and Ireland are the Light-bellied Brent Geese from northern Greenland and the north-west Canadian Islands. Virtually the whole of this population winters in Ireland where censuses are now held each winter. The results are not yet available, but it is likely that the population has exceeded 20,000 for the first time since counts began in the 1950s. The total in January 1985 was just over 18,000, and there were at least 20% young in the flocks this winter, well in excess of probable mortality.

The Light-bellied Brent Geese which breed in Svalbard winter partly in northern Denmark and partly at the Lindisfarne NNR in Northumberland. No information is yet available on breeding success or total numbers, but the birds are unlikely to have bred very well, and so will not have been able to build up their very low population of c.3,500.

European White-fronts from the north-western Russian arctic had an excellent breeding season (30% + young) but neither this nor the cold weather during the winter had much influence on the numbers coming to their regular haunts in southern England and south Wales. The peak count will probably lie, as usual, between 6000 and

7000, only a small fraction of this population whose numbers, mainly in the Netherlands, are well in excess of 200,000.

The final and eastern-most population of geese wintering in Britain is that of the Dark-bellied Brent, breeding on the Taymyr peninsula between about 85 and 105 E. This population has a tradition of breeding either very successfully (sometimes with upwards of 50% young) or not breeding at all (with less than 1% young). It was therefore somewhat unusual this winter to find around 25% young, especially as the two previous years had been breeding failures, so that at the beginning of the 1985 summer virtually every bird was at least three years old and so mature enough to breed. Censuses in the British range, around the east and south coasts of England and south Wales, revealed about 82,000 in December. Comparable figures from the rest of the range in Germany, the Netherlands and France are not yet available but are likely to show a total population of some 170,000.

This brief survey shows that British, and Irish, populations of wintering geese remain very healthy, not forgetting the few hundred Bean Geese to be found in a couple of localities in Scotland and Norfolk. Even when breeding success has been only moderate, populations are able to maintain themselves. In the last 30 years the annual mortality suffered by most of our goose populations has fallen, thanks to reduced shooting pressure and more refuges. Feeding for geese is also better than it used to be, both in the autumn and early winter, so reducing deaths from starvation, and in spring, when the birds are needing to lay down reserves prior to the migration and breeding season

*Malcolm Ogilvie*

| Regional distribution of Pinkfeet and Greylags in November. |          |      |      |          |      |      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------|------|----------|------|------|
|                                                             | PINKFEET |      |      | GREYLAGS |      |      |
|                                                             | 1983     | 1984 | 1985 | 1983     | 1984 | 1985 |
| North Scotland                                              | 13.4     | 19.4 | 20.2 | 40.1     | 42.0 | 42.4 |
| East central Scotland                                       | 38.8     | 32.0 | 28.7 | 33.9     | 26.4 | 38.0 |
| South-east Scotland                                         | 27.5     | 12.6 | 30.2 | 9.9      | 5.0  | 4.5  |
| South-west Scotland                                         | 2.9      | 6.7  | 5.9  | 12.3     | 20.1 | 11.1 |
| North England                                               | 16.2     | 18.4 | 11.7 | 3.8      | 6.5  | 3.9  |
| East England                                                | 1.2      | 10.9 | 3.2  | -        | -    | -    |

Figures are percentages of total populations.

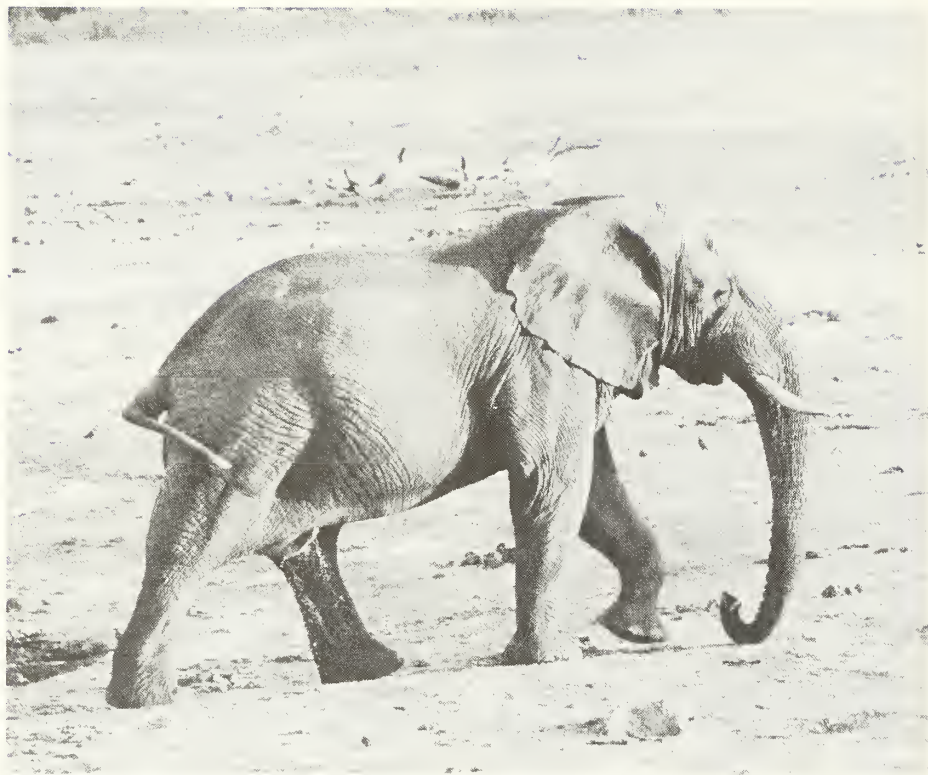
# Birdwatching in Zimbabwe — the heart of Africa

Zimbabwe has really been known to the western world for only 100 years, although David Livingstone visited the Victoria Falls in 1855 and a few white hunters and prospectors roamed the country collecting ivory and looking for gold. The country's earlier history is recorded in the imposing stone structures, near Masvingo, from which the modern name Zimbabwe or 'Houses of Stone' is derived — evidence of a civilisation that survived until 1500 AD. There are also tantalising glimpses of early African life, in the form of artistic cave paintings of animals and hunting scenes, left by the earlier Bushman inhabitants.

In September 1984 a party of eight, mainly SOC members, caught an evening flight from Gatwick to Harare. The thrill of arriving in a new country after a short overnight journey is hard to describe. For birdwatchers there is the excitement of seeing new species; in the first hour after our arrival we recorded Pied Crows, Palm Swifts, Racquet-tailed Rollers, Bulbuls, Drongos, African Hawk Eagle and many others. After a night at the Oasis Motel in Harare we drove out to Mcllwaine Game Park and settled into comfortable lodges, situated on a lovely escarpment. Previous occupants had encouraged Gambian Sun Squirrels; before we had unpacked they scampered in looking for titbits. On the rocks beside the lodge were several colourful Agama Lizards and families of Rock Hyrax, basking in the warm sunshine.

The vast numbers and gaudy plumage of African birds is breathtaking; brilliant Lilac-breasted Rollers, Glossy Starlings, Mocking Chats, Barbets, Kingfishers, Weaver Birds, Shrikes and Sunbirds are common. Birds of prey are also numerous; Yellow-billed Kites, Bateleurs, Wahlbergs, African Hawk and Black Eagles were frequently seen. One of the reasons for this profusion of birds is

*Dark Chanting Goshawk eating a snake.*



Zimbabwe's geographical position in the continent of Africa. In addition to the extensive range of resident birds, many intra-African migrants travel south in September to Zimbabwe to breed, followed by flocks of palearctic migrants escaping from the cold northern winter.

From Mcllwaine we motored south to Kyle Game Park near Masvingo. One of the highlights there was a marvellous view of a Martial Eagle, which stooped and landed a short distance away in tall grass: it evidently missed its prey for it took off again and flew low over our heads, giving us unforgettable views of this superb raptor. Other memories of Kyle include a Paradise Flycatcher building its delicate nest, and the display flight of a Black-bellied Korhaan. There was plenty of larger game in the Park: Rhinoceros, Giraffe, Impala, Zebra, Warthogs and our first snake, a small Puff Adder. The day we visited Great Zimbabwe was also memorable, not only because of the historical interest of the impressive stone structures, but also for excellent views of a Gymnogene, a specialised member of the hawk family. It has an unusual adaptation — a double-jointed tarsus, which enables the bird to insert one of its long legs into a hole in a tree while hanging on with the other, and so to extract food, such as nestlings, with the minimum of effort.

Our next stop was Penalong, in the Eastern Highlands, where we stayed at 'La Rochelle', the former home of Sir Stephen Courtauld, now administered by the National Trust of Zimbabwe. In the extensive gardens we saw our first Knysna Lourie, a beautiful bird with emerald green plumage and contrasting red wings. We toured the Vumba Mountains, where among many forest birds we had excellent views of a Crowned Eagle, which preys on monkeys.

At the nearby Nyanga National Park, feeding on Protea flowers on the upper slopes of Mt Inyangani (8500 ft), Zimbabwe's highest mountain, we found Gurney's Sugar Birds and several sunbirds, including the Malachite Sunbird, which has a lovely iridescent green plumage. The many crystal clear streams and lakes in the area are stocked with trout and the bird life is varied and interesting. We saw Giant Kingfishers, Peregrine Falcons, Auger Buzzards, Long-crested Eagles and beautiful Blue Swallows, which have exceptionally long tail streamers and build their nests in underground holes, such as those made by Anteaters.

A short air flight took us to Victoria Falls. The contrast between the cool Highlands and the warm and Low Veld was stark. Our lodges here were beside the Zambezi River, in an area teeming with birds and wildlife. Here the scale was larger and so were the animals: Elephant, Buffalo, Hippopotamus and Lion, plus numerous Waterbuck, Impala, Bushbuck, Sable and Roan Antelope and many Warthogs. At night Elephants fed around the lodges and their squeals and grunts reminded us that we were in closer touch with wild Africa. There was a warning notice in our lodge: "Do not feed Claud the Clawless Otter — he bites". That evening we were relaxing on the dark verandah, listening to the night noises, when Claud appeared in our midst, determined to be fed! He did not appreciate a slipper proffered in self-defence and was eventually enticed away with bread while the party beat a hilarious retreat behind closed doors.

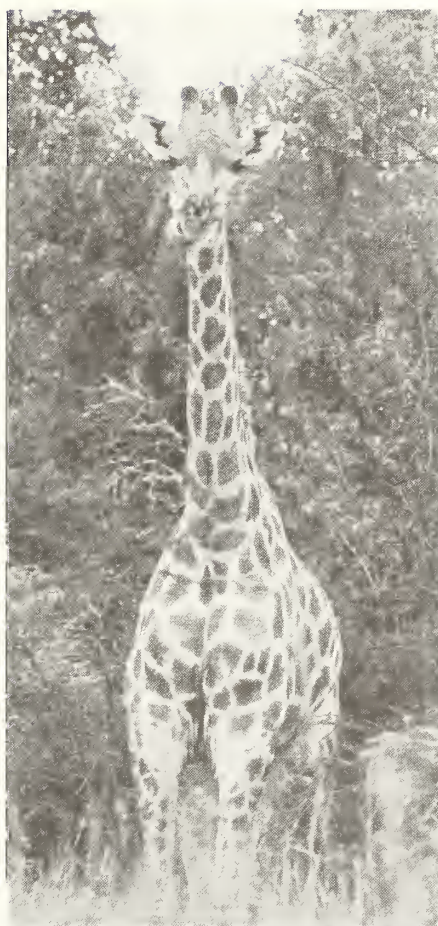
The early morning and evening excursions along the banks of the Zambesi were fascinating. Returning one evening the party were standing in the back of the vehicle, with the roof raised, all eyes searching the surrounding bush for movement. Suddenly,



around a corner, we met a herd of 200 Buffalo making their way inland after slaking their thirst; they stopped and turned to face us. Normally we would have waited and enjoyed the sight, but with the sun near to setting we eased forward and the herd parted, giving us close views of these powerful animals. As this was the dry season the famous Victoria Falls were not at their most impressive. In some ways this was an advantage, however, for when the Zambesi is in flood clouds of spray obscure the view. Our next stop was Hwange National Park, the largest in Zimbabwe, where over 400 species of birds and 107 of animals have been recorded. Some of the animals are present in large numbers; the Elephant population, for example, is estimated to be over 20,000. Among the birds we saw were many raptors, a large number of vultures, several hornbills — including the turkey-sized Ground Hornbill — and Shrikes of many kinds, among them Long-tailed and Crimson-breasted. One evening we had excellent views of Pennant-winged Nightjars. In the breeding season the males grow a single two foot long feather in each wing; these are used in the striking territorial display.

Overall we had a most enjoyable and stimulating safari. We recorded 330 species of birds, many lovely butterflies and other interesting insects, and had dramatic views of large game. Everyone we met was helpful and we found Zimbabwe a very friendly country to visit. My grateful thanks go to all members of ZIMSAF 84 — Helen and Ken Halliday, Nancie and Robin Raban-Williams, Margery Kimpton, Joan Howie and John Melrose — whose help and constant humour made my task as organiser very easy and enjoyable.

**Brian S. Turner**



*All photos by B. S. Turner*

## New hope for oiled birds

Until recently attempts to clean up the victims of oil spills have been disappointing. This now seems set to change. Following encouraging results south of the border by the RSPCA, the SSPCA are currently converting a large barn on Middlebank Farm in Fife to provide cleaning units, accommodation and test pools. A vehicle is being converted to transport up to 360 birds from anywhere in Scotland to Middlebank. It is hoped to have the facility operational by the end of 1986. The RSPCA report an 85% success rate, though this is conditional on selecting appropriate birds for treatment; the worst affected still have to be humanely destroyed. The Scottish birds will be ringed before release to see how they fare and the SSPCA will be running training courses at Middlebank for volunteers who will then help collect and prepare birds for the new centre.

## News in Brief

The **Scottish Conservation Projects Trust** has moved its HQ to Balallan House, 24 Allan Park, Stirling FK8 2QJ (Tel. 0786 79697).

**Visitors to Fair Isle** this season will have a wider choice of travel arrangements, including flights from Orkney as well as Shetland. For further information and details of the 1986 programme (including special reductions) contact Liz Riddiford, The Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland (Tel. 035 12 258).

A photographic exhibition on the theme "Scotland's Landscape, Flora and Fauna" is being held at the RSPB's Vane Farm, Kinross, to coincide with the Commonwealth Games, 28 June-28 July.

**The Birds of Fife** by Anne-Marie Smout, a St Andrews Branch member, is due to be published early this summer by John Donald, Edinburgh; cost about £10 in hardback.

## Small ads

**SCOTTISH HIGHLAND WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS.** Week long birdwatching courses in comfort in small friendly guest house. Expert tuition, individual attention, safaris, lectures. Beginners welcome. SAE: Ron Youngman, 'Atholl Bank', Pitlochry, Perthshire (0796 - 2753).

**BIRD JOURNAL** back numbers supplied. — D. Morgan, Whitmore, Umberleigh, Devon.

**SHETLAND BIRD REPORT 1984.** £2.20 from M. Heubeck, 3 Lighthouse Buildings, Lerwick, Shetland. Back issues: 1973-1979 £0.75 (1975 unavailable), 1980-1983 £1.00. Prices include p & p.

**SPEY VALLEY** — 4 well equipped self-catering holiday cottages conveniently situated in picturesque rural surroundings close to the Insh Marshes, a Nature Reserve managed by the RSPB, and only a short drive from the Cairngorms and Loch Garten (Ospreys). Abundant wildlife all around with good hill-walking. For further details and brochure send SAE to: Alvie Estate, Kinncraig, Kingussie, Inverness-shire or Tel. (054 04) 255.



*Long-tailed Shrike.*



*Starlings gathering to roost. R. T. Smith*

## Birdwatching at Lochmaben Lochs

Seven lochs surround the town of Lochmaben, which lies in the Annan Valley about 8 miles east of Dumfries. The lochs are essentially eutrophic and support a fairly rich and diverse wildlife. With the exception of Mill Loch, which is over 16m deep, they have a maximum depth of 3-5m. All have at least some reedbed and there are several good examples of alder carr. Castle Loch, the largest, and nearby Hightae Loch form a local nature reserve administered by the local authority. The remaining lochs — Kirk, Mill, Upper and the two Blind Lochs — are within a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.

### *Wintering wildfowl and gulls*

The prime interest here for birdwatchers must surely be the wintering wildfowl. Castle Loch and, to a lesser extent, Hightae are goose roosts. Numbers peak in spring — at 2500 Greylag in 1984 and 13,400 Pinkfeet in 1986 — but some 700-1000 Greylags are present for most of the winter. It is well worth checking flocks of feeding geese in the surrounding fields as Bean Goose, both races of White-front, Snow Goose, Barnacle and Brent have all occurred in recent years.

Mallard numbers are highest in autumn, particularly on Castle and Kirk Lochs. Wigeon seldom occur in flocks of over 200, unless disturbance or freezing has driven them from

nearby ox-bow lakes. The best conditions for seeing Teal are probably during times of flood; this species tends to be found more often along the River Annan than around the lochs. Small numbers of Pintail, Goldeneye, Shoveler and occasionally Gadwall can be seen in autumn and spring but are rarely encountered in winter. Pochard have recently peaked at 150-200 and about 70 Goosanders usually winter on Castle Loch, while a spring influx produced a count of 165 in March 1982. Less common ducks recorded occasionally include Smew, Long-tailed Duck and Scaup. Some 15-20 Whooper Swans are regularly present in winter.

There is a good-sized Black-headed Gull roost at Castle Loch, often with over 8000 present, plus smaller numbers of Common Gulls. Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls gather during the afternoon but most leave at dusk, presumably for the Solway, while the occasional Lesser Blackback over-winters. Kittiwakes have been recorded each January since 1982.

### *Passerines and waders*

In winter flocks of tits (including Willow) and thrushes feed amongst the trees, and Siskins and a few Redpolls in the alders. Starlings roost in the reedbeds, presenting a tempting meal for Sparrowhawks. About

5000 is the usual winter maximum, but 20,000 were estimated to be coming to roost at Castle Loch in autumn 1984.

Spring sees the return of the warblers, flycatchers and hirundines. Grasshopper Warblers fill the evening air with their "angler's-reel" song, Sedge Warblers chatter from waterside bushes, Spotted Flycatchers nest in the ivy on the walls of the ruined castle, and Swallows and Martins find rich feeding over the water surface. The 6-10 pairs of Great Crested Grebes breeding in the area are mainly on Castle Loch, and there are a few pairs of Mute Swans, Mallard, Coots and Moorhens. Herons used to breed in the reserve but left as a result of timber operations in 1982.

After a dry summer, such as that of 1984, exposed mud in the southeast corner of Castle Loch attracts a few passage waders. Green-shank, Redshank, Dunlin, Common Sandpiper, Jack Snipe and Ringed Plover visit most years, and Green Sandpiper, Ruff, Spotted Redshank and Bar-tailed Godwit occasionally. In October (and in late spring) it is worth looking for passage Little Gulls and Black Terns, and at this time of year the odd Slavonian Grebe may appear — five were on Castle Loch in 1982.

Finally, the more unusual species recorded in the Lochmaben area in recent years have included Black-throated Diver

(three in March 1984) and Ruddy Duck (brief appearances at Hightae in 1983 and 1984). A Hobby spent two days at Castle Loch in July 1982, and Marsh Harriers were seen in 1982 and 1984. Lochmaben certainly has lots to offer the birdwatcher.

Access

Lochmaben is on the A709 Lockerbie-Dumfries road, from which one can obtain reasonable views of Kirk Loch and Castle Loch. For Hightae Loch follow the B7020 Lochmaben-Dalton road down the west side of Castle Loch for 1 mile, park at the nature reserve sign and walk down the access path to the loch. Mill Loch is at the north end of the town — take the right fork at Lochmaben Town Hall. Upper and Blind Lochs can be viewed from the Shieldhill road BUT please ask the local farmer's permission if you require closer views.

Paul Shimmings



Stop Press

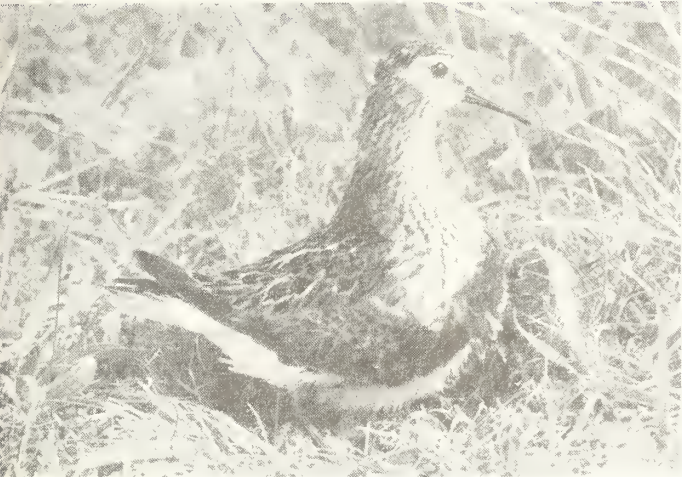
The new assistant manager for The Bird Bookshop is Fiona Slack, a 25 year old ecology graduate who lives near Edinburgh.

A handsome cake, appropriately decorated with a Crested Tit, was a highlight of the Golden Jubilee reception in Glasgow on 21 March 1986 (see page 6). The honour of cutting it fell to Valerie Thom, whose book was launched at the reception.

Don Smith

1985 Photographic Competition winners

(1 and 3 are reproduced from transparencies, 2 from a black and white print)



First: Dunlin settling on the nest.

Philip Newman



Second: Wheatear with prey.

Edmund Fellowes



Third: Swallows at the nest.

Willie Middleton

Remember: Entries for the 1986 competition must be in by the end of September.

Thanks —

to all contributors to this issue, especially our artists, David Mitchell, Iain Macleod and Keith Brockie, and photographers, Bobby Smith, Don Smith and Brian Turner.

Wanted —

more drawings and photographs. We would especially like to hear from anyone able and willing to illustrate particular species on request and at relatively short notice.

## General News and Notices

### The February auk wreck

During the first three weeks of February 1986 a large-scale wreck of auks was noticed all along the east coast of Scotland and northern England. From Shetland to Holy Island counts were made of dead or dying birds and these revealed that well in excess of 3,000 birds were affected. Dozens of auks were reported as far inland as Stirling and Lake of Menteith, with reports of individuals on motorways, in fields and back gardens, on ponds and in plantations.

Most of the birds affected were Guillemots, with smaller numbers of Razorbills, Puffins and Little Auks. A large proportion of the Guillemots were first-winter birds in poor bodily condition; except in Shetland, where adults predominated. Most were males.

Starvation seems to have been the cause of death, perhaps linked to strong winds at sea, but the reason for the lack of food remains unknown. Until recently the Guillemot population was expanding and there was a large surplus non-breeding population. In the last few years most monitoring sites at breeding colonies have started to show declines. The lack of food could be a natural phenomenon and may well sort itself out; however, industrial fishing maybe implicated. Whatever the reason, it is always cause for concern when large scale seabird mortality occurs. Some observers, particularly Pete Kinnear (NCC, Fife) and Colin Crooke (RSPB, Highland Office) carried out detailed analyses of corpses, with some being sent for post-mortem examination of liver and kidney samples. This work may lead to more detailed papers in the near future.

Many thanks to all who sent in records.

*Iain Macleod*  
RSPB Scottish Office

*Pete Ellis*  
RSPB Shetland Office

### Aftermath of Berwick swan oiling

On 7 March 76 Mute Swans and one Whooper were released back onto the Tweed Estuary at Berwick. For the previous six weeks they had been held in captivity for cleaning, after being affected by the 2,000 gallons of oil spilled into the harbour at the end of January. The birds joined the small group of swans already present, all that is left of the 200 strong winter flock that traditionally gathers at Berwick. Precise numbers are uncertain but at least 72 swans died or were destroyed immediately after the incident. Oiled birds were later reported along the coast, near St Abbs and at Lindisfarne, as well as up the Tweed Valley.

The Berwick incident is the third major oiling to affect Scottish swans since 1974. Like the disaster at Montrose in February 1980 (200 swans affected, c60 died), the Berwick spillage fortunately occurred in winter. Had either incident occurred during the autumn moult period, the result could have been catastrophic, as between them these two sites then hold over a thousand birds — most of the swan population of east and central Scotland.

Among birds affected were 25 ringed swans. Nine had been ringed in the Montrose flock in 1980 or 1983, emphasising the interchange between these two major moulting and wintering sites — indeed one poor bird had been caught up in both oiling incidents. Apart from one ringed in Fife in 1969, the remaining recoveries were all of birds ringed as cygnets in the Lothians since 1982 (the lack of recoveries further south probably reflects the lack of ringing).

One positive outcome of the disaster was the opportunity to examine lead levels in a sample of 19 corpses. Results showed that Berwick birds had low levels of lead in their tissues, indicating little recent exposure to lead poisoning, as might be expected from an area where coarse fishing is largely absent.

In order to assess the success of the cleaning operation, and to discover more about the movement of swans along the east coast, all the birds released were colour-ringed with large white leg rings bearing a three-letter combination. Reports of these birds should be sent to: Chris Spray, Prospect Villas, Great Bradley, Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 9LH.

*Chris Spray*

### Scottish Ringers' Conference

This year's Ringers' Conference is being organised by the Highland Ringing Group and the SOC and will be held at the Landmark Centre, Carrbridge, during the weekend of 22nd/23rd November, 1986. Anyone who is willing to give a short talk should contact Roy Dennis, RSPB, Munloch, Inverness IV8 8ND. Further details of the programme and booking form will be published later.

### Little Gull records wanted

Anyone with records of Little Gulls is asked to send details of numbers, dates and locations to David Mitchell, 17 Janefield Place, Dundee. David is trying to piece together a clear picture of the movements of this species, which is most regularly seen around the Tay and Forth.

### Noteworthy ringing recoveries

The Highland Ringing Group's April 1986 newsletter includes details of four unusual recoveries. Pride of place must go to a Buzzard ringed by Andrew Ramsay at Maryburgh near Dingwall in June 1984 and recovered 994km away, near Cologne in West Germany, in January 1986 — the first-ever foreign recovery of a British Buzzard. This was one of a brood of two; the other bird was recovered, more typically, 47km SE at Forres, Moray.

Waders of interest included an Oystercatcher ringed as a chick on Fair Isle in June 1961 and caught at Fort George in December 1985 — at 24 years old! A Knot originally ringed on the Moray Firth in April 1980 was caught on the Tees Estuary on 6 December 1985 and recaptured 25 days later back on the Moray Firth at Fort George. Finally, a young Garden Warbler caught in early August 1985 by Bob Swann at Drumadrochit by Loch Ness (where there is a small breeding colony) was found dead in January 1986 at Atonsu, Ashanti Region, Ghana. This is only the second British recovery of this species south of the Sahara, the previous one also being in Ghana.

*Bob Swann*

### Wader Study Conference comes to Scotland

From 12-14 September 1986 Oatridge Agricultural College, Broxburn, West Lothian will be playing host to an international group of wader enthusiasts who will spend the week-end endlessly discussing their favourite birds. The occasion is the annual Wader Study Group Conference which, reflecting the interest in Waders in Scotland, is being held north of the border for the first time.

The Wader Study Group is a collection of amateurs and professionals interested in waders. It was founded in 1970 with the aim of encouraging contact between wader workers; helping organise studies of waders and providing a forum for the exchange of information. These aims are realised through the Wader Study Group Bulletin which is an informal publication with a mix of articles, announcements and requests for information produced three times a year and the annual conference which, by moving from country to country, aims to attract as many members as possible.

This year's Conference will have delegates from the USA, the Netherlands, France and Germany amongst others and will range over many topics from international migration flyways to small local studies. Why not take this opportunity to come along to the Conference and find out more about these fascinating birds? Further details about the Conference (and membership of the WSG) are available from: Nigel and Jacquie Clark, Dept of Zoology, Edinburgh University, West Mains Road, Edinburgh EH9 3JT. Tel: 031-667 1081 Ex 3211 or 031-556 6042.

## Reviews

**The Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand** by P. C. Bull, P. D. Gaze and C. J. R. Robertson; The Ornithological Society of New Zealand; 1985; 296 pp; many maps, overlays and microfiches of the original data; £18.

Many atlases published in the last ten years have tried to be of interest to the casual reader as well as producing baseline data for researchers and conservation decisions. This atlas is certainly not for the casual reader as it consists largely of maps with only a couple of sentences about each species. It is, however, a superb example of the way a very large amount of data can be made available in a usable form. The microfiches will be of great use to planners and conservationists as they give the basic data — something it is often difficult to obtain. In short an excellent book, but only for those with a special interest in New Zealand birds.

Nigel Clark

**Gamebirds of the Northern Hemisphere** by I. Brodie. Whitewolf Publications; 1985; 238 pp; 24 colour plates; many maps; £16.50.

This is essentially a book for aviculturalists. It is written by one and, apart from quite a good set of colour plates, there is little to commend it to ornithologist readers. The text covers evolution of the Galliformes, their conservation, species descriptions and avicultural methods, much of it superficial and speculative, and much of it in a style that is distinctly idiosyncratic. It undoubtedly contains some useful information, particularly

in the sections concerned with aviary design and breeding techniques, but overall the book is not well produced. It does not appear to have been properly checked, it lacks an adequate bibliography, and the poor syntax, numerous spelling mistakes and other errors range from the incomprehensible to the downright absurd (have you ever seen a Reeves pheasant with a tail over 150 metres long?!).

John Savory

**Der Zug Europäischer Singvogel: Ein Atlas der Wiederfunde Beringter Vogel**, pt. 4, by G. Zink, Vogelwarte Radolfzell; 1985; 112 pp; 148 maps; 76 DM.

The concluding volume of a series that displays over 16,000 ringing recoveries of 95 species of European passerines on 535 maps. Part 4 covers Pied Flycatcher, *alba* wagtails, Waxing and 11 buntings. Text and captions are entirely in German and there is still no word of an English translation. However the maps alone are full of interest and the series should be in every ornithological library in Europe.

Stanley da Prato

## Short Reviews

**Bird Census and Atlas Studies** by K. Taylor, R. J. Fuller and P. C. Lack; BTO; 1985; 437 pp; many diagrams, maps and tables; £10.

This collection of papers on aspects of censusing birds will prove of interest to those involved in this field. It has been well produced for the cost, which brings it well within the budget of the amateur reader.

**Birds Beyond Belfast** by the Belfast RSPB Members' Group; Belfast RSPB Members' Group; 1985; 118 pp; many maps and line drawings; £2.95.

A companion volume to *Birds Around Belfast* produced by the Belfast RSPB Members' Group in 1981 (£1.50), this book is a guide to birdwatching locations throughout Northern Ireland.

**The Birds of Japan: A Checklist** by M. Brazil; Shimuzu; 1985; 23 pp; £2.

A list of birds of Japan in English, Latin and Japanese.

**Easter Birdwatching in Crete** by S. Coghlan; S. Coghlan; 1985; 18 pp; 4 line drawings, map; £2.50.

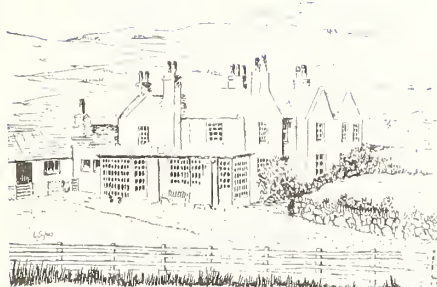
A checklist of birds seen at Easter in Crete between 1981 and 1984, and a guide to sites.

**Gulls and Plovers: The Ecology and Behaviour of Mixed-Species Feeding Groups** by C. J. Barnard and D. B. A. Thompson; Croom Helm; 1985; 302 pp; many tables and diagrams, line drawings; £25.

This book, which looks at feeding strategies and group behaviour within mixed species flocks, will be useful to professional ornithologist students but of limited interest to the amateur.

**A Year of Bird Life** by R. Hume and S. Sullivan; Croom Helm; 1985; 128 pp; many colour illustrations; £4.95.

A collection of articles from *Bird Life*, the magazine of the YOC, arranged by month.



## Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay — Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist — almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc.

There are no day-trippers, no caravanners, etc., but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hôte cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating and private facilities). Drive on-off car and passenger ferry ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Dinner, accommodation and breakfast from £25.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles.

There are also three luxury self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £55.00 weekly. Also special demi-pension arrangements for Field Study parties from £775 daily. Details on request.

THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL  
(Kevin and Christa Byrne)

Telephone: Colonsay (09512) 316 — open all year

N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inc. p&p describes the island's birds — 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.



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## SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £50. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £1 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Jacquie Clark, Business Editor, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

## Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 July for the September number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries — and suggestions — will be welcomed by the Editor (Tel. 0738-23508). Fuller details, and information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in SB 13:280-281.

## SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

|                                                                                                         |        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Adult .....                                                                                             | £10.00 |
| Junior (under 18 or student under 25) .....                                                             | £4.00  |
| Family (husband, wife & children under 18) .....                                                        | £14.50 |
| Life: individual £200.00, family £300.00 .....                                                          |        |
| Pensioner individual £6.00, family £8.50 .....                                                          |        |
| Further details from Membership Secretary, Miss Pat Webster, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT. |        |

## SOC Notices

### Branch Meetings

The dates of the first branch meetings next winter are as follows:

- Monday, 15 September: Aberdeen, Borders, Glasgow
- Tuesday, 16 September: Edinburgh, Inverness, Stranraer
- Wednesday, 17 September: Ayr, Dumfries, St Andrews, Thurso
- Thursday, 18 September: Dundee, Stirling
- Thursday, 25 September: New Galloway

The first meeting of the Dundee Branch is in the Staff Club on the 10th floor of the Tower Extension, University of Dundee. Subsequent meetings will be held in the McManus Museum, Albert Square, Dundee. The Inverness Branch also has a new venue, the Loch Ness House Hotel, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness. The St Andrews Branch will be meeting next session in the St Andrews Golf Hotel, St Andrews.

### Jubilee Conference

The Annual Conference and AGM will be held the weekend 1-2 November, 1986 at The Marine Hotel, North Berwick, East Lothian. The conference programme and booking form will be included in the September mailing to members.

### SOC Bird Bookshop

The 1986 Spring Supplement, with details of new titles, special offers and sale books, is available FREE from the Bookshop. Remember, all books are sent post and packing free to club members.

### Bookshop Staff

Peter Bell left us again in March to take up a post with the RSPB as a summer warden at South Stack, Anglesey in Wales. We were sorry to lose him, again, but wish him all the best in his new job. Una Croll is working temporarily, as a typist/clerk, updating the Bookshop mailing list, the stock control system and computerising the Club membership. Stan da Prato has also helped out in the Bookshop.

### Change of Local Recorder

Dr Martin Bell is moving from Aberdeen to Stirling and has had to resign as local recorder. The new recorders for *Grampian Region, excluding Moray District*, are Mike Innes and Brian Stewart. Records should be sent to *Michael Innes, 106A Queens Street, Peterhead, Aberdeenshire AB4 6TY*.

Records should be sent in Voous order, as for all other areas, since the computerised recording system is no longer being used.

The new recorder for *Strathclyde* — Argyll is Dr A. R. Jennings, 1 Ferryfield Drive, Connel, Argyll, PA37 1SP.

### Change of Address

Roy Dennis has now moved from North Kessock to: Inchdryne, Nethybridge, Inverness-shire PH25 3EF.

### Inverness Branch Field Trip

The Branch is having a Jubilee Field Trip, led by Roy Dennis, to Strathnairn at 6.00 p.m. on Saturday, 21 June, followed by a barbeque, cheese and wine party at Balnaforch House at 9.00 p.m. Further details and tickets, £3.00, are available from Carol Munro, Ashton Farm Cottage, Inverness, telephone 0463-241 359.

### Stirling Branch Outings

(not detailed on the yellow sheet distributed earlier)

### BLACKFORD — UPPER GLENDEVON RESERVOIR

Sunday 15 June. Leader — Cliff Henty. Meet 9.00 a.m., Fountain Road car park, Bridge of Allan. Bring packed lunch and wear stout footwear.

### FORTH ESTUARY AT KINNEIL

Sunday 17 August. Leader — David Thorogood. Meet 11.00 a.m., Albert Hall car park, Stirling, or 11.45 a.m. at sewage treatment works access road, Kinneil. High tide is at about 2.00 p.m. Recommended footwear is wellington boots — this is not the most salubrious area! (And there are potential hazards, so no young children, please).

### Jubilee Buffet Supper

Dundee Branch's celebration supper is to be held on Thursday 18 September in the University Staff Club, price £6 per person (exclusive of wine).

### Fife and Kinross Breeding Birds Survey

The St Andrews Branch is conducting a breeding survey this summer of some species whose local status is unclear. The species concerned are: Corn Bunting, Whitethroat, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Sparrow.

Would members who would like to help in the survey please send SAE (6½" x 9") for instructions and record cards to the organiser: Wendy Mattingley, 49 Elizabeth Street, Tayport, Fife DD6 9NB.

She would also welcome any casual records for these species from anywhere in Fife and Kinross, by 31st August, please.

### "Fife for Birds" Symposium

The St Andrews Branch is hosting a one-day symposium on the general subject of "Fife for Birds" on Saturday 4th October 1986, as its contribution to the Club's Golden Jubilee. The symposium will be designed for the 'average' bird-watcher (if there is such a person!) and will show just how good a place Fife is for pursuing our hobby. It will take place in St Andrews University, and the probable cost will be £4.00. Full details in the next "Scottish Bird News", but keep the date free in your diary now.

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Birds



THE SCOTTISH  
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

# Scottish Bird News

September 1986

No. 3

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Edited by Valerie Thom  
assisted by Stanley da Prato



## European diploma for Fair Isle

**Designated a National Scenic Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest, Fair Isle has the same status as a National Nature Reserve and has recently become only the fifth site in Britain (the second for Scotland, and 25th ever) to be awarded the Council of Europe's prestigious European Diploma.**

The Diploma was awarded, at a ceremony in Edinburgh Castle on 19 June, 1986, in recognition of Fair Isle's outstanding natural history interest and cultural heritage. A ceremony and dance followed later the same day on Fair Isle itself.

The George Waterston Memorial Centre was also opened on 19th June, a fitting tribute to the late Dr. George Waterston (once owner of Fair Isle and co-founder of Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust), whose love of and interest in Fair Isle, its people and its birds helped to secure a future for the Isle. Housed in what was once the Auld Schule (Old School), the Centre displays the history and traditions of this fascinating island.

Despite its small size, 3 miles long by 1½ miles wide, Fair Isle is internationally important as a migration station and breeding seabird monitoring site. Lying midway between Orkney and Shetland, at the point where the North Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean, Fair Isle is at a crossroads for birds from a wide area of the northern hemisphere. During the course of a year species recorded include those on spring and autumn migration to and from Scandinavia, Iceland and Greenland, and others from as far afield as central Europe, North America, central Asia and Siberia. Of the 337 species recorded on the Isle, many are known as 'Fair Isle specialities' — turning up there with surprising regularity but rare or unknown elsewhere in Britain. During both spring and autumn large 'falls' of birds can occur on Fair Isle, sometimes composed of a variety of species, at other times one species alone may number many thousands. Sights such as these are rarely forgotten and can be as exciting and as exhilarating as seeing a new bird for Britain.

May, June, September and October are the main months for numbers of migrants on Fair Isle, but migrants do occur at other times and, although generally in smaller numbers, may include out-of-season rarities or 'irruptive' species such as Crossbill, Waxwing or Long-eared Owl.

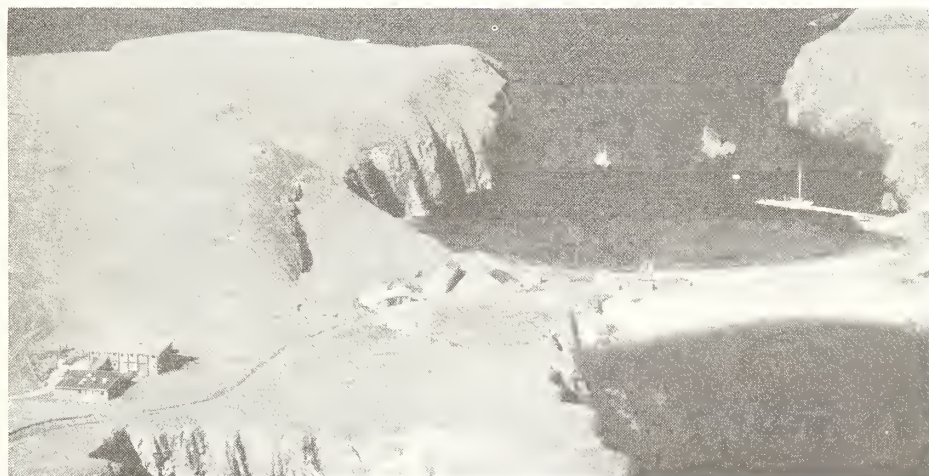
In summer, colourful flowers carpet the cliffs and provide a stunning backcloth for the Isle's vast seabird cities. Nutrient-rich waters around Fair Isle and Shetland, plus weathered sandstone cliffs, provide ideal nesting conditions for the 18 species of seabird which breed on Fair Isle. The Isle's seabird populations have dramatically increased over the past 20 years and today tens of thousands of individuals breed here. This has enabled Fair Isle Bird Observatory, in conjunction with the Nature Conservancy Council, to set up a Seabird Monitoring Programme which assesses, among other things, adult survival, fledging success, food brought to chicks and population fluctuations. The seabird colonies on Fair Isle are surpassed by few other sites, and most of these, such as St. Kilda, are far less accessible. Seabird colonies on Fair Isle do not require long hikes in order to observe them. Indeed, many species can be seen from the comfort of the Observatory building. The cliffs throng with breeding seabirds. On the grassy tops Puffins allow close approach and pose comically for photographs, while on the boulder beaches Guillemots, Razorbills, Shags and the Fair Isle speciality, the Black Guillemot or Tystie, vie for nesting space. Heather moorland

on the Hill provides nesting grounds for Great and Arctic Skuas, whilst Eider ducks nestle amongst their eiderdown. It is often possible to watch and photograph at close quarters without danger to the watcher or disturbance to the birds. With or without the breeding birds the cliff scenery is breathtakingly spectacular.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory was established in 1948 and is one of a number of observatories sited around the coast of Britain, providing valuable information and insight into migration and population fluctuations. Long-term studies and data collection cover various topics, such as moult, biometrics, identification, breeding ecology, movements of summer migrants, and weather-related occurrence of vagrants. Many visitors, beginner and expert alike, have contributed to this work and their participation is both welcomed and encouraged. Founded by George Waterston to help preserve the Island's birds and community, Fair Isle Bird Observatory continues to be one of the world's leading bird observatories. With the generous help and support of the National Trust for Scotland, EEC, Highlands and Islands Development Board, Shetland Islands Council and the many friends of Fair Isle, the Island's vibrant and welcoming community, beautiful and spectacular scenery, and varied natural history are ensured for future generations to enjoy.

*Elizabeth Riddiford.*

*Observatory and North Haven. Dave Wheeler*



## More snow-bathers

M. H. Maxwell asks if snow-bathing is a common form of behaviour for Magpies (*SBN* 2:2). I think not, but little is published on the subject and no doubt it is under-recorded. I have been able to trace records for a number of both passerine and non-passerine species, in which *Corvidae* feature more often than other families. In his book *The Crows — a study of the Corvids of Europe*, Coombs quotes one observation of the Magpie snow-bathing, and a few of the other records mention that such behaviour has taken place even with suitable standing water nearby.

With reference to the note on **Buzzard Taking Teal**, Pinowski & Ryszkowski (*Brit. Birds* 55:473) record a 'duck' as being taken as prey by a pair of Buzzards in Poland.

Norman Elkins

I was intrigued by M. H. Maxwell's note and wish to report a similar incident at Girdleness car park, Aberdeen.

I was photographing a group of c20 Snow Buntings feeding on hard snow in very strong sunshine after a severe spell of cold weather. The birds were feeding on a pile of seed (no doubt a "plant" by the local ringing group) and were tame enough to observe at close quarters. Suddenly several flew a short distance from the main group into the shadow of the low surrounding wooden fence, where they first lay on their breasts, tilted forward and dug their legs and feet into the snow. They then propelled themselves quickly through the snow, moving their heads rapidly from side to side. I can only describe it as "snow-ploughing". They threw up a spray of snow and left a clearly visible track; at times they became virtually submerged.

I have heard of Snow Buntings finding deep-frozen insects as snow melts on the tops, and at first assumed that this behaviour had some survival value. However, in this case a plentiful supply of food was near at hand and there was little (if any) thaw. It seemed therefore to be a communal bathing ritual.

I was astonished to find, on checking my notes, that this behaviour was observed on Sunday, 23 February, 1986 at approximately the same time in the afternoon as M. H. Maxwell's sighting!

Jim Riddoch

Records of any other species indulging in similar antics would be welcome. — Eds.

## 1986 Seabird slump on Canna

Following an exceptionally cold February and a long, late, cool and very wet spring, seabirds on Canna had one of their worst ever breeding seasons since our monitoring programme began in 1969.

Worst affected were Shags. From 1690 nests in 1985 numbers dropped to 436 nests, of which only 253 (58%) contained eggs or chicks. Only 5 ringable young were found compared to the normal 1000+.

Gulls were also doing badly. Great Black-backed Gulls declined from 76 to 60 pairs, and of 20 pairs checked 15 had failed to produce young. Herring Gulls which were down 18% on 1985 had a poor year too, with 55% of nests in study areas failing to produce chicks compared with only 21% in 1985. The 29 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gulls was our lowest ever count. Kittiwakes continued their slow decline, being down to 803 nests (peak 991 nests 1982). In one study plot of 50 nests not one single pair had eggs or chicks.

Guillemot numbers were also down — by 17%, though like Razorbills, which showed no drop, they seemed to be doing quite well with numerous chicks in evidence.

What, then, was the cause of this? It appeared to be food related. Normally one sees great rafts of feeding seabirds round the island and on the boat trip from Mallaig. This year the seas were virtually birdless. The birds must have been feeding some distance from Canna.

We have been collecting fish samples from Guillemots in recent years. These show sprats to be the preferred food (50% of all samples) followed by sandeels (33%) and others, mainly gadoids. This year no sprats were brought in till the last day. Sandeels made up 69% of the sample (n=72) but they were considerably smaller than usual, with 62% under 110mm — far smaller than anything we have recorded before (the normal size is c140mm).

Was this weather-related or the first signs of the effect of industrial fishing in the Minch? Only future monitoring can tell. A fuller report will appear in a later edition of *SBN*.

Bob Swann

*It seems that Puffins in the Firth of Forth and Shearwaters on Rhum may also have had a poor season. — Eds.*

## Composite gull/tern colony

In July 1985 I watched a composite colony of Common and Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns beside the River Findhorn near Tomatin, Inverness-shire, at about 350m altitude. The colony contained 3 pairs of Common Terns, and c10 and 50 pairs of Common and Black-headed Gulls respectively. Gull numbers are approximate only, as both species had young newly able to fly and failed breeders may already have left. Proof that the Common Terns had eggs or young was not obtained, although all three pairs appeared to hold sites. One pair in particular occupied precisely the same spot on each of my three visits. At times those in the air displayed vigorous aggression to myself and to gulls flying close over the tern's sites.

The colony comprised three sub-areas occupied by the three species separately and was sited on a shingle promontory no-where more than a few feet high. Grass covered a raised central area which was occupied by the Common Gulls. The three pairs of Common Terns held sites at one end of the Common Gulls' area, where the grass broke up into a few small tussocks among the shingle. The Black-headed Gulls occupied the grassy edge of the shore, separated from the Common Gulls by the narrow line of shingle.

Although the three species nested in their own parts within the colony, the whole colony appeared as one unit, and functioned as one unit in the sense of reaction to a potential intruder. Within a few miles along the Findhorn there were similar sites, some with the two gull species nesting together, some with Black-headed Gulls nesting alone, and some without gulls or terns. This suggests that it could have been the instinct to nest colonially, rather than an attraction to the particular site, which caused the three species to nest together in this composite colony.

Common Terns are known to nest alongside Black-headed Gulls and other species of terns at coastal sites and Black-headed Gulls associate with a variety of species on the breeding grounds in some areas. It is not unusual in the Scottish Highlands for Black-headed and Common Gulls to nest together (R. H. Dennis, pers. comm.), but I know of no other instance of these two species and Common Terns all breeding in one colony.

Harry E. M. Dott

## Come to Fair Isle this year.

Magnificent cliff scenery/fine seabird colonies/migrant birds/flora/knitwear/archeology/island life. Have a holiday to remember. Enjoy comfortable full-board accommodation and learn more about birds in an informal, friendly way.

Guide to travel inclusive prices: from approx. £155 pp per week (by sea from Aberdeen) £215 pp per week (by air from Edinburgh). YOC, family and group reductions available.

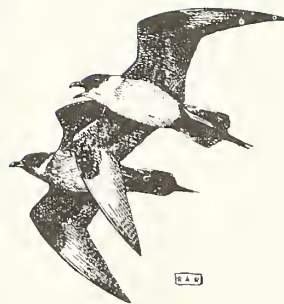
Check on poss. Bargain Breaks. Vacancies March-Oct.



Further details/bookings, see to:

Liz Riddiford (B), Fair Isle Lodge & Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland.

Tel: 035-12 258.



## Recent Reports

*These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to **Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland**, via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period April to June is covered here.*

Spring and early summer were cool and wet with very little in the way of easterly winds, although a huge fall of **Robins** and thrushes occurred in late April. A spell of good weather in late June would appear to be all the summer that Shetland is going to get this year. As a result of the bad weather many summer migrants were late in arriving and most species seem to have had a poor breeding season. In Shetland terns have had yet another disastrous breeding season and most other seabirds have also fared badly. A shortage of sandeels again appears to be the problem, fuelling continued speculation that the industrial fishing of sandeels is implicated.

**Great Northern Divers** reached a maximum of 22 in Quendale Bay in April, the Whalsay **White-billed Diver** was last seen in early May and an immature was at Reawick on 15th June. Peterhead had a passage of 211 **Manx Shearwaters** on 30th May and 241 passed St. Abbs on 6th June. A **Night Heron** was in Orkney, a **Little Egret** in North Uist in May, and a **Great White Egret** was at Camps Reservoir in June. Forth had a **White Stork** and Loch of Spiggie and Foulie were visited by the same 6 **Mute Swans**. Single **Snow Geese** were at Rattray Head and on the Ythan and a **Canada Goose** on Unst and Fair Isle. Aberlady had a high spring count of 110 **Barnacle Geese** in late April, whilst a **Brent Goose** was at Gourrock in June. Two males and a female **Mandarin Duck** were on Loch Lomond in May and the Tynninghame **Black Duck** was still present. **Garganey** turned up at 6 sites from Shetland to Loch Lomond with at least 9 birds involved. Orkney had a drake **Blue-winged Teal** and a flock of 160 **Scaup**. Spectacular drake **King Eiders** visited Shetland, Orkney and the Ythan. St. Abbs saw a passage of 245 **Common Scoters** on 23rd June, a pair of **Surf Scoters** visited Gosford and a drake was at Scapa Flow. An influx of **Ruddy Duck** brought at least 10 birds to 8 sites from Shetland to New Cumnock.

An immature **White-tailed Eagle** was still on Unst in April. Unusual numbers of **Marsh Harriers** occurred in May and June with 16 birds, all females or immatures, at 15 localities. A **Goshawk** was seen near East Kilbride and a **Buzzard** on Out Skerries in April. **Rough-legged Buzzards** occurred in Orkney and at Loch of Strathbeg. A **Hobby** was near Peebles in June. **Quail** were reported from Shetland, Aberlady, Baron's Haugh and Renfrew and the Borders. At least 3 **Corncrakes** were heard in Shetland, with 2 others in Orkney. A **Crane** which passed over Shapinsay in April was probably the same one seen later at Sandwick in Shetland, (it's on the house list); others were also seen in Orkney and one at Ardnamurchan.

A **Black-winged Stilt** visited St. Abbs in May and a **Stone-curlew** West Linton in March. East Lothian had at least 4 **Little Ringed Plovers**, a **Little Stint** was on Noss in June, and **Temminck's Stints** were seen in Unst and Aberlady. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** visited North Ronaldsay and a **Curlew Sandpiper** Papa

Westray, with a group of 4 more at Aberlady. A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was last seen in Orkney in May and single **Jack Snipe** in Shetland and at Ballindaloch Muir in April. Unusual locations for **Black-tailed Godwits** were in Clydesdale and at Stornoway, with a flock of 10 involved at the latter. Fair Isle had its first **Spotted Sandpiper**.

Two **Pomarine Skuas** were still on the Beaully Firth at the time of writing. The passage off Balranald reached a staggering 1700 in May, along with an equally impressive 800 **Long-tailed Skuas**. A **Little Gull** spent April in Lerwick; another was at Rattray and 5 at Meikle Loch. **Iceland Gulls** were scarce with only 3 reported in Shetland. Shetland had a run of **Sandwich Terns**, with reports of up to 4 from 8 locations, a **Little Tern** was reported in Shetland and Orkney, and a **Black Tern** at Loch of Strathbeg. Fair Isle had a **Stock Dove** and small number of **Turtle Doves** appeared at several sites in Shetland, and singles at Ardsrossan and St. Abbs. A **Scops Owl** was in Orkney in June for the second year running and a female **Snowy Owl** visited Fair Isle. Fair Isle had a spring record of 7 **Long-eared Owls** on 23rd April. A **Tengmalm's Owl** was found dead in Orkney in June (why do they always turn up in Orkney?) At least 6 **Hoopoes** were seen in southern Scotland and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** reached Fair Isle.



*King Eider drake displaying (Eider drake behind), Ythan Estuary, May 1986.  
S. M. D. Alexander*

**Short-toed Larks** were on Fair Isle and Out Skerries, **Blue-headed Wagtails** in Shetland and at Aberlady, and a **Grey-headed Wagtail** on Fair Isle. **White Wagtails** reached high counts of 66 at Linwood and 64 at Longhaugh Point. A **Waxwing** was found dead in Orkney and 2 reached Fair Isle in April. The late April falls (21-24th) produced 50 **Dunnocks** on Fair Isle and 40 on Out Skerries, and a record count of 900 **Robins** on Fair Isle, with hundreds in Shetland and thousands in Orkney, 800 at St. Abbs and 500 at Eyemouth. Also involved were **Ring Ouzels**, (30 in Shetland and 45 on Fair Isle),

**Blackbirds**, (18,050 on Fair Isle) and **Fieldfares** (1280 on Fair Isle). There was a spring record count of 1150 **Song Thrushes** and 500 **Redwings** also on the island. Shetland had 7 **Mistle Thrushes** with 10 on Fair Isle and another in Orkney. Fair Isle had a maximum of 250 **Chaffinches** and 725 **Bramblings** and a spring record of 20 **Mealy Redpolls**. The Isle of May had a **Thrush Nightingale** on 7th May and a **Nightingale** was seen in a Kelso garden on 4th May. **Bluethroats** were scarce in contrast to last spring; one on Fair Isle on 21st June was the latest record ever on the island. **Black Redstarts** were better represented, with 7 in Shetland, 3 on Fair Isle and 7 in Orkney.

Scotland and Fair Isle's 3rd ever **Savi's Warbler** was seen in June and 8 **Marsh Warblers** visited the island at the same time. North Ronaldsay had a **Great Reed Warbler** and two **Icterine Warblers** were seen in Shetland, which also had 2 male **Subalpine Warblers**. A fine adult **Barred Warbler** was on North Ronaldsay and a probable **Greenish X Willow Warbler** hybrid sang in the Highlands. St. Abbs had a **Firecrest** and superb male **Red-breasted Flycatchers** reached North Ronaldsay and the Isle of May, although **Pied Flycatchers** were scarce. **Golden Orioles** were at 4 sites in Shetland and on Fair Isle, North Rona and Aytton, with 2 at St. Abbs. A **Lesser Grey Shrike** was on Yell but **Red-backed Shrikes** were scarce and the only **Great Grey Shrike** reported was on Fair Isle. A sub-adult **Rose-coloured Starling** on Noss was followed by an adult on Burra Isle in June.

A single **Tree Sparrow** was in Unst and a **Goldfinch** on Fair Isle. Three **Siskins** in Stornoway in May was unusual and they were also widespread in Strathclyde in June. There was a small irruption of **Common Crossbills** in June. Four female or immature **Scarlet Rosefinches** were seen in Shetland, with red males on Fetlar and Fair Isle. Three northern **Bullfinches** were seen in Orkney and an influx of **Hawfinches** for the second year in succession brought 13 to Shetland, 3 to Fair Isle and 7 to Orkney in April with 3 in May and another in June and singles at St. Abbs and the Hirsell. Male **Lapland Buntings** were at Sumburgh and Aberlady. Fair Isle had a **Rustic Bunting** and a **Little Bunting** in May, with another of the latter in Orkney. A fine male **Black-headed Bunting** spent a week in Shetland before word got out, too late for most birders to see it. A **Chestnut Bunting** reached Fair Isle on 15th June, the day before a **Budgie** was picked up on a ship 6 miles off Aberdeen. Perhaps the budgie was a genuine vagrant?

Best sightings of the period were 6 **Killer Whales** in Yell Sound and a **Walrus** which put in two tantalising appearances in Shetland.

*Pete Ellis*

**Grebes in Gosford Bay, East Lothian.** Ian Andrews and Alan Brown are looking at the status of grebes at this locality and would be grateful for any unpublished records from Gosford Bay between and including 1974 and 1985. Please send to Ian Andrews, 15 The Parsonage, Musselburgh, Midlothian EH21 7SW.



## The Sparrowhawk

by IAN NEWTON

Dr Newton's monograph of this widely distributed raptor is based on 14 years' research and fieldwork in SW Scotland. During the period he attempted to trap and ring all Sparrowhawks in the study area and to find their nests. As a result many individual birds were known throughout their lives.

The book draws on Dr Newton's wide knowledge of the species, and that of other workers in Britain and abroad, and benefits additionally from his particular interest in population regulation and breeding performance of the Sparrowhawk and the remarkable contrast in size between males and females.

Thirty-eight drawings by Keith Brockie complement the text and there are over 80 diagrams and 50 photographs.

396 pages plus 24 plates,  
£16.00 net

## Birds in Scotland

by VALERIE M. THOM

390 pages, 26.5 x 19 cm, £24.00 net

T & A D POYSER

## Strange events at Aberlady Bay

Readers who know Aberlady for its bird life would be intrigued to see the Reserve featured prominently on the front page of the "East Lothian Courier" recently under the title "Police swoop on 'gay' beach party". Apparently groups of men find the more secluded dunes ideal for activities that are not normally encouraged on the beach, or indeed anywhere else. A raid by "plain clothes" policemen (who must have had trouble deciding on suitable disguises) resulted in seven arrests out of around 50 men. This number is probably a record but the Reserve Warden has had a series of complaints from visitors, as well as some odd personal encounters, such as the occasion when he came on six nudists dancing "Ring a Ring a Roses" on the sand. The Chairman of the Management Committee, who is also a local minister, commented that "we must look at this more closely" which was not, perhaps, the best choice of words in the circumstances!

All this publicity seems to have frightened off the offenders; a recent visit by SBN personnel armed with telephoto lenses found nothing more than moulting Eiders and summer wild flowers to focus on. However it does raise intriguing questions for the management of the Nature Reserve. East Lothian District Council have been so keen to limit the numbers of visitors to Aberlady that no one is meant to refer to it in public and organisations which do so, including RSPB, have been sent rather sharp letters. Hopefully these bizarre events will result in a more positive policy towards visitors. Aberlady is so accessible and well known that local SOC members have been pressing the Management Committee for some time to provide improved facilities for both birds and birdwatchers. There can, after all, be no more effective deterrent to persons with tendencies they would prefer to keep secret than a regular procession of birders bristling with high powered optics.

Stan da Prato

## March 1986 goose count results

In mid-March Scotland held 92% of the 97,000 Pink-footed Geese counted in Britain and 97% of the 51,000 Greylags. As David Salmon, organiser of the national wildfowl counts, notes in his (unpublished) report to all who helped with the count, Greylags in particular are under-recorded at this season — the November 1985 total was 107,000. The Wildfowl Trust has therefore decided to discontinue the March goose counts, but to encourage wildfowl counters to make their monthly counts at dawn or dusk so as to obtain information on roosting ducks as well as geese.

The numbers of Pinkfeet in southern Scotland were lower than usual for March, despite a count of 17,000 in Wigtown Bay. In the north-east there was a notable concentration near the coast, with 15,350 at the Loch of Strathbeg and 13,550 around the Ythan. For Greylags the situation was reversed, with relatively low counts in the north-east and slightly higher numbers than usual in the south-west. The largest counts were 5,000 on Drummond Pond, Crieff, and 3,100 on Bute.

## Putty fills the gap

Soon after new ground floor windows were installed at our house just before Christmas, my wife and I noticed that fresh putty was being removed from lower parts of the frames. Indentations left in the soft material indicated that the culprits were avian. Disappearance of the putty continued and on two occasions in late January I saw a female blackbird pecking and eating the putty avidly for several minutes at a time, while it was standing on the window ledge. This behaviour ceased in early February, by which time 110cm of putty had been totally or partially removed. Our local builder told me that he had seen this happen before, especially during hard weather.

Presumably the bird or birds were eating the putty in order to obtain energy from the linseed oil, which has a similar metabolisable energy content to other vegetable oils (about 9000 kilocalories/kg). The non-nutritive component (mainly chalk) is probably harmless, and, by acting as a filler, may itself help to alleviate hunger. The putty may thus have provided an important supplement to the diet at a time of freezing conditions when energy requirements were high and food availability low. The weather was even colder later in February, but no more putty was taken despite much more being available. By then, however, the putty was getting quite hard, and the energy content of linseed oil declines as it oxidizes, so birds may no longer have been able to extract it profitably.

We are left with the question of how birds were attracted to the putty in the first place. When fresh it has a distinctive smell so perhaps they smelt it (contrary to popular belief, research has indicated that many species of birds have a well developed sense of smell). Alternatively, they may be continually sampling new materials encountered in their environment, particularly at times of severe hunger. They may even have observed the putty being applied and investigated it out of curiosity.

John Savory

Attacks on putty seem to be most often recorded with tits, but Simms (*British Thrushes*, p113) records Blackbirds and Song Thrushes taking putty from a glasshouse near Norwich. — Eds.

## Golden Jubilee Lecture

Dr. Ian Newton on "The Sparrowhawk"

At the George Square Theatre, University of Edinburgh, on TUESDAY 9 DECEMBER 1986 at 7.45 p.m. Dr. Newton will be available afterwards to sign copies of his new book 'The Sparrowhawk' (illustrated by Keith Brockie), which will be on sale. Tickets (inclusive of wine or soft drink): Adults £2, Juniors under 18 years 75p. Apply to Mrs E. Leven, 13 Henderson Row, Edinburgh EH3 5DH enclosing SAE and cheque payable to SOC Edinburgh Branch, or collect at Edinburgh Branch meetings. This event is being sponsored by UNIROYAL, manufacturers of the famous Hunter 'green wellies'.

UNIROYAL



### Photospot

Don Smith connected an infra red trip to a Nikon F2 and Metz flashgun to capture this excellent shot of a Tawny Owl bringing a Short-tailed vole back to its nest. This system means that the bird takes its own picture in the photographer's absence. The drawback is that you use rather a lot of film — in this case around 3000 exposures over a 3 year period.

### Ready for bird-BQ?

**CAITHNESS**  
**DUNNET**     **By THURSO**  
**PUFFINS ON YOUR DOORSTEP!**  
 THE MOST NORTHERLY PRIVATE  
 HOUSE ON THE BRITISH MAINLAND  
 UNRIVALLED VIEWS TO ORKNEY AND  
 THE OLD MAN OF HOY  
 SPECTACULAR CLIFF TOP POSITION  
                                  providing  
 A HAVEN FOR WILDLIFE  
                                  including  
 Puffins, Razor Bills and Great Skewers

Thanks to Frank Spragge for this item, which appeared in the Scotsman on 10 July.

### Notices

#### Yellow Goosanders

Past work on Goosanders in Northumberland has used wing tags and dyes to investigate the post-breeding dispersal of juveniles and the moult migration of males. In 1986 an attempt is being made to investigate the post-breeding dispersal and wintering areas of adult females breeding in Northumberland. Nesting females were caught in the spring and all their white plumage was dyed yellow with picric acid. Please send details of any sightings of these yellow birds (location, date and Goosander group size) to Steve Petty, FC, Wildlife & Conservation Research Branch, Ardentenny, Dunoon, Argyll PA23 8TS or Brian Little, 37 Stella Hall Drive, Blaydon, Tyne & Wear, NE21 4LE.

The conference, in Eilat, Israel on 22-27 March 1987, is to be preceded and followed by tours — for both 'dedicated ornithologists' and those also interested in historical and archaeological sites. The eight conference themes cover a wide range of topics related to raptor research and conservation; two are convened by British ornithologists — 'Population biology and breeding' (Dr. Ian Newton, ITE) and 'Legislation' (Dr. Peter Robinson, RSPB). Further information and a brochure are available from Dr. Robin Chancellor, c/o British Museum (Nat. Hist.), Cromwell Road, London SW7.

#### World Conference on Birds of Prey

1987 has been declared the International Year of the Raptor. From March 1987 to April 1988 the ICBP's World Working Group on Birds of Prey is mounting an extensive educational campaign in co-operation with conservation organisations throughout the world, with the aim of increasing awareness of the need for raptor protection. Proposed projects include the production of booklets, slide sets, 16mm film and video cassettes, an extensive publicity campaign, international drawing, sculpture, photography and film competitions, and the Third World Conference on Birds of Prey.

#### Responsive Yellowhammer

Each month I have a meeting for the Gigha YOC Group at my cottage. On one occasion I was giving them bird calls to remember and try out and, as a pair of Yellowhammers had been around the garden, I got the children to mimic "a little bit of bread and no cheese". The noise they made sounded like a regiment of Yellowhammers "taking the mickey" out of their own distinctive call. Unexpectedly, we got a response. The hen Yellowhammer flew in and landed on the fence. The male hung back but came near enough to enchant the children.

Vie Tulloch

### 'The Osprey Village'

Beautiful Boat of Garten in the central Scottish Highlands by RSPB Loch Garten reserve.

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**Tourist Association Boat of Garten Inverness-shire**

September publication



## THE ATLAS OF WINTERING BIRDS IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Compiled by  
PETER LACK

This companion volume to *The Atlas of Breeding Birds* is derived from the surveys, organised by the BTO and IWC, of birds present in the winters of 1981/82, 1982/83 and 1983/84. There are full-page two-colour maps for the 192 main species, each faced by a page of text commenting on the survey results, the species generally and the distribution as mapped. In addition there are introductory chapters by Dr Lack on the maps, the weather in the three winters, bird patterns and movements; appendices describe the planning, organisation, field methods, and the processing of data from record cards to computer output and maps. A team of 23 artists, led by Robert Gillmor, has provided the line drawings which head the species accounts.

448 pages, £19.00 net

T & A D POYSER

## Shorebird Counts in the Moray Firth

The Moray Firth is of national and international importance for passage and wintering concentrations of shorebird species: waders and wildfowl. Recognition of the importance of the area came as recently as 1969 when counts began as part of the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry. These early counts were rather piecemeal but established the undoubted importance of the area and led to the designation of a number of NNRs and SSSIs.

The first successful coordinated count was made by Currie *et al* in 1970. From the winter of 1981/2 and until that of 1984/5, F. L. Symonds (working for the NCC under contract to Britoil as part of the Beatrice Environmental Programme) was employed full-time to study shorebirds in the Moray Firth. This impetus to the study of shorebird populations, together with the unfailing enthusiasm and dedication of members of the Highland Ringing Group and many others, resulted in the first coordinated count for several years during the winter of 1984/5, after which it was decided that coordinated counts should be continued in future years.

To achieve full coverage in the 1985/6 season, a team of 35 counters was required. Five regional organisers were appointed to ensure complete coverage for their area and to collate results, which were gathered within five days of the count and passed on to the central

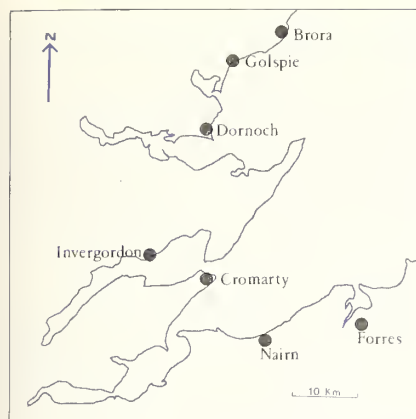
organiser. A news-sheet was then prepared for circulation to all counters. Four coordinated counts were attempted, the first in October to coincide with the peak dabbling duck numbers, and three mid-winter ones (December - February) to build up a picture of winter wader and duck numbers in the Firth. It was decided that, as such a mammoth effort was involved, both ducks and waders should be counted on the same date.

Fortune favoured our hardy team of volunteers, who gave up four Sundays, and a full set of counts was achieved on each date — anything that moved got counted. With the exception of the January count, when winds were gale force (affecting the accuracy of duck counts), the weather was extremely favourable — not what we're used to at all!

It was successfully argued that the Moray Firth should be a single count unit (Fig. 1) and that it should not be subdivided into separate sections as had been the case previously. Ringing studies have shown many waders e.g. Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit, to be very mobile throughout the whole Moray Firth complex. Equally large and even larger areas e.g. the Severn, Firth of Forth, Solway and Wash, constitute single "resorts" in the annual reports of the BTO and Wildfowl Trust. The boundaries of the Moray Firth are from Brora, East Sutherland, in the north to Findhorn,



*How many waders? Unfortunately, this photo — found in the SOC files, cannot be properly credited as the photographer's name is not on it — nor are the species and location!*



Artwork: R. D. Murray

Morayshire, in the east; excluded for historical reasons are Burghead Bay and the estuaries of the Lossie and Spey, which are counted separately.

The most recent comparable total count of waders prior to this winter's is that made in January 1985 when 36,440 were recorded. Unfortunately no wildfowl count was made. The January 1986 wader total was 35,521 but the peak count had come in December when 38,111 was the final tally.

### Waders

October counts and peak winter counts for the main wader species are shown in Table 1. The month of the peak winter count is also shown.

The composite winter peak gives a total of 39,640 waders of nineteen species with the six main ones accounting for nearly 95% of the total. This total would have put the Moray Firth in twelfth position of all estuaries in Britain and Ireland compared to totals the previous winter. We'll have to wait and see how well we've done this year. The Moray Firth is obviously extremely important and is second only to the Solway in Scotland in terms of total numbers, with the Forth coming in third.

TABLE 1: WADER TOTALS

| Species             | October Count | Peak Winter Count (Month) |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Oystercatcher       | 11754         | 11316** (Jan)             |
| Lapwing             | 1408          | 977 (Dec)                 |
| Ringed Plover       | 624           | 302* (Dec)                |
| Grey Plover         | 211*          | 40 (Jan)                  |
| Golden Plover       | 175           | 57 (Dec)                  |
| Curlew              | 3121          | 3013** (Feb)              |
| Turnstone           | 405           | 599** (Feb)               |
| Bar-tailed Godwit   | 3151          | 5569** (Jan)              |
| Black-tailed Godwit | 11            | 2 (Feb)                   |
| Redshank            | 7629          | 6268** (Dec)              |
| Greenshank          | 9             | 5 (Dec)                   |
| Knot                | 1720          | 3693** (Dec)              |
| Dunlin              | 4722          | 7634* (Dec)               |
| Sanderling          | 26            | 38 (Dec)                  |
| Purple Sandpiper    | 1             | 120 (Jan)                 |
| Others              | 27(2sp)       | 7(4sp) (Jan)              |

\* and \*\* refer to qualifying levels for National and International Importance. \* mean winter count greater than 1% of estimated British wintering population. \*\* mean winter count greater than 1% of estimated NW European wintering population.

### Wildfowl

Only Wigeon and Teal showed up in peak numbers in October with 36,141 and 4,146 respectively. Peak winter counts and month are listed in Table 2. Pink-footed Geese also move through the area but outside the period counted.

TABLE 2: WILDFOWL TOTALS

| Species                | Peak Winter Count (Month) |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mute Swan              | 338* (Jan)                |
| Whooper Swan           | 388** (Feb)               |
| Greylag                | 5405** (Jan)              |
| Shelduck               | 1253** (Feb)              |
| Wigeon                 | 23725** (Dec)             |
| Teal                   | 3490** (Feb)              |
| Mallard                | 5590* (Dec)               |
| Pintail                | 367* (Feb)                |
| Pochard                | 14* (Feb)                 |
| Tufted Duck            | 1323* (Feb)               |
| Scaup                  | 467* (Feb)                |
| Goldeneye              | 1074* (Feb)               |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 2786** (Jan)              |
| Goosander              | 1941** (Dec)              |
| Others (5sp)           | 15                        |

\* and \*\* refer to qualifying levels for National and International Importance. \* mean winter count greater than 1% of estimated British wintering population. \*\* mean winter count greater than 1% of estimated NW European wintering population.

The results of these coordinated counts confirm the international and national importance of the Moray Firth for shorebirds both on passage and throughout the winter as shown by Table 3.

TABLE 3: NUMBERS OF SPECIES OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE IN THE MORAY FIRTH

|          | Nationally Important | Internationally Important |
|----------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Waders   | 9                    | 6                         |
| Wildfowl | 13                   | 7                         |

The value of continuing the counts is immense in the light of the numerous developments and fresh proposals to develop throughout the area and are instrumental in making any representation on conservation grounds.

The Highland Ringing Group is grateful to Britoil PLC who provided financial assistance. Finally, I'd like to thank all counters who took part this winter — keep fit for next season.

S. J. Aspinall



Wigeon drake: Keith Brockie

## Small ads

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# What future for the flows?

The "Flow Country" of east Sutherland and Caithness is unique to Britain. This flat, windswept landscape is one of the largest blanket bogs in the world, and approaches closer to tundra than anywhere else in Scotland. To stand in one of the complexes of lochans on the Caithness flows, look over this almost endless landscape to distant Ben Hope and Ben Loyal in the west, and listen to the call of Greenshanks, Golden Plovers and Dunlin is an unforgettable experience.

Only in recent years has the ornithological value of the flow country become properly appreciated. Since the late 1970's the NCC and RSPB have surveyed over 200 km<sup>2</sup> of the moorland of the flows. From this one can see just how exceptional the breeding bird community is. The area is estimated to hold almost 70% of Britain's breeding Greenshank population, 30% of our Dunlin and 10% of our Golden Plover. Many rarer species also breed; Arctic Skua and Common Scoter are found almost nowhere else on the UK mainland. Black-throated Divers, Greylag Geese and Wigeon all have important populations here. Red-throated Diver, Golden Eagle and Merlin are all present, as are virtually all of the commoner moorland birds such as Teal, Curlew and Redshank. The general rule, that the further north one is in Britain the more moorland birds are present, certainly holds good here.

Until recently no-one considered that the wildlife of this area was seriously under threat. The land had been used for rough grazing, sporting and fishing for many years, and these activities were all compatible with the wildlife interest of the area. Since 1981 however this picture has changed, almost beyond recognition in some parts of the flows. Afforestation has arrived and by 1986 almost 40,000 hectares (100,000 acres) of bog have been planted, or approved for forestry planting. The use of mixtures of lodgepole pine and sitka spruce is said to overcome the problems of forestry establishment on deep peat in the north of Scotland, and this massive afforestation programme seems set to continue. Some 65,000 hectares, more than one third of the total area of the flow country, is now in the hands of forestry interests, and at the present rate

of planting two thirds of the flows will be afforested by the turn of the century. Indeed, almost all of the flow country area could now be considered technically plantable with conifers. Although the forestry here seems likely to be amongst the riskiest in Britain, the combination of low land prices, government grants and tax concessions, which meet up to 70% of the costs of establishing new forests, makes afforestation in the north an attractive proposition to private investors. The level of risk is emphasised by the fact that the largest private forestry company in Britain, the Economic Forestry Group, will not recommend forestry in this area to their investors: they consider it economically unsound, regardless of the conservation arguments. Despite this, Fountains Forestry continue to expand their operations and the wildlife of the area

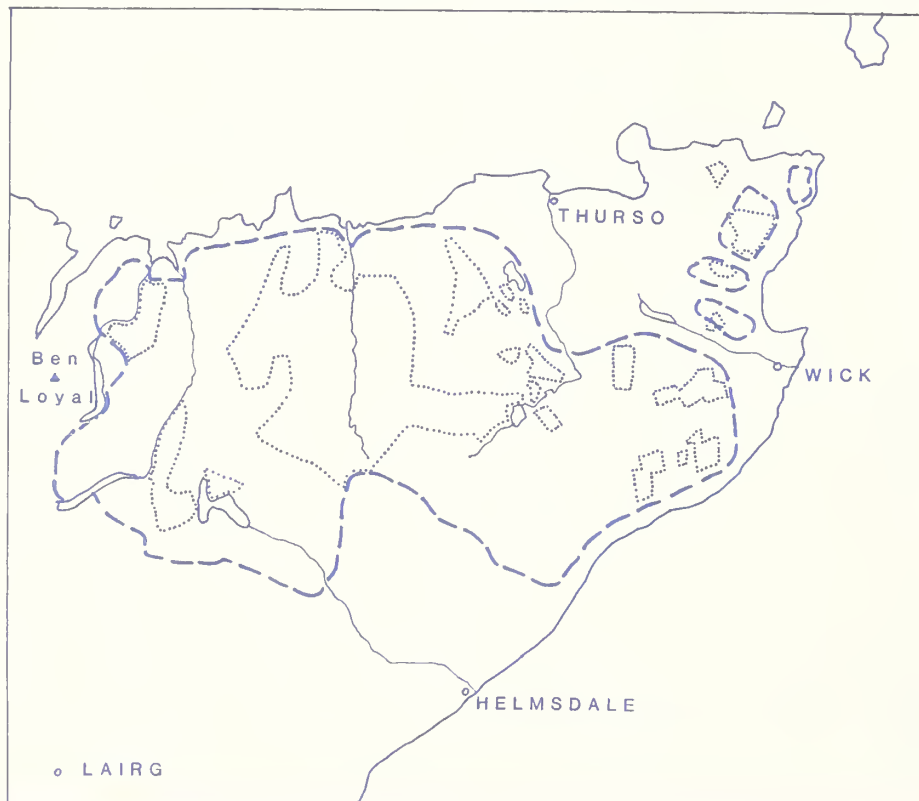


continues to be affected.

The precise extent to which birds are affected is unknown, for a number of reasons. Obviously where conifer plantations replace open peatlands, birds such as Greenshank, Golden Plover, Dunlin and Curlew will be excluded from that land within the space of a few years. Breeding lochans for Red-throated Divers may be completely obscured, and the effect of planting close to larger lochs may have adverse effects on breeding Black-throated Divers and wildfowl. Even at the end of a rotation of timber the natural moorland habitat will not re-develop, and the effects of drainage suggest it will be unlikely that waders will return to felled areas in any numbers. The drainage operations for new forestry may also be affecting areas which are not planted with trees, and the overall effects of plantations on nearby open moorland are not yet known.

Only this year, after five years of massive afforestation, have the Forestry Commission commissioned RSPB to study the "edge effects" of new plantations. These could include the effects of drainage and of increased losses from predators such as crows and foxes living in plantations, while some moorland species could have an aversion to nesting close to plantations. At least some of these effects may be cumulative over a number of years as forests grow. It is likely, therefore, that birds will be affected over a larger area than that which is actually planted, and the

*The flow country of east Sutherland and Caithness (dashed line) and the area currently controlled by forestry interests (dotted line).*





A typical flowland pool system, with recently planted ground beyond. Stewart Angus

existing plantations have already fragmented many areas of the flow country.

To date there has been almost no consultation about the effects of this new forestry on nature conservation. The Nature Conservancy Council have notified about 7% of the area as SSSIs and have only been consulted where these, or a small number of proposed SSSIs, have been directly affected. Because of the widespread nature of the bird interest over the whole of the flow country, the SSSI system is insufficient here, and it is quite clear that a better system of consultation and consideration of new forestry is needed. Last year the RSPB presented a report to the Secretary of State for Scotland detailing these

problems, and called for a halt to all new forestry in the flow country until a full review of forestry in the area could be made. Despite further discussions with the Forestry Commission there is so far no indication that anything of the sort will be carried out. In the meantime afforestation continues in the flow country with little consideration for the effects on wildlife, and with no authority responsible for trying to achieve a sensible balance of forestry with farming, conservation and other land uses. Indeed, until the research is completed we do not even know how far from the planted trees the new forestry will exert effects on breeding bird populations.

Given these factors, the RSPB

continues to maintain that there should be a temporary halt on all forestry in the flow country. In this breathing space the research could be completed, and a policy could be developed for the establishment of the right sort of forestry in the right places in Sutherland and Caithness: not in large conifer monocultures and not on the best flow land areas for birds, which in general are the worst planting ground for new trees. If changes do not occur we may be witnessing the decline and loss of a unique bird community in Britain at a time when the government and all political parties are claiming an increased interest in the environment.

The RSPB through its action, and the Nature Conservancy Council with its new review of forestry and nature conservation, are both playing their part to ensure that this does not occur. You can play your part too. make **your** opinion known to your MP or to the Secretary of State. The flow country may seem a long way from you, while you read this article in Edinburgh, or Aberdeen or even Inverness: just think how remote it seems from Westminster were changes to safeguard the future of the flows need to be brought about.

*If any member would like to know more about forestry and the flow country, or would like help or advice on how to contact their MP, David Minns and I would be only too pleased to assist.*

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*Greenshank at the nest. Iain Macleod*





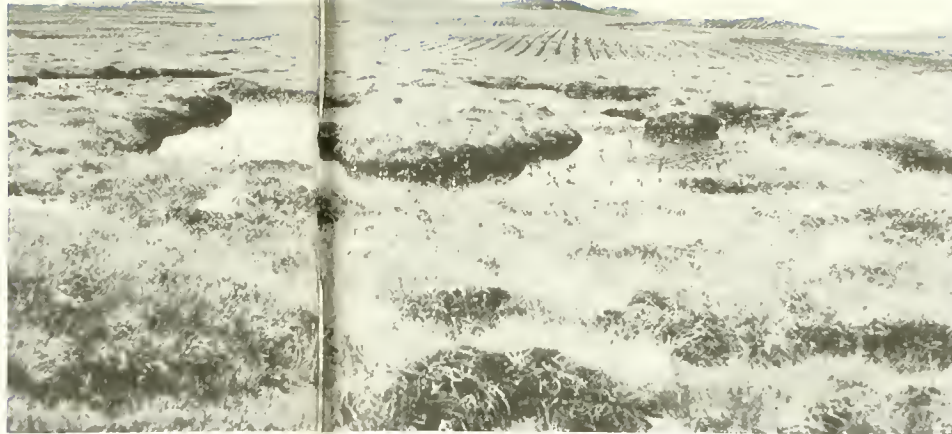
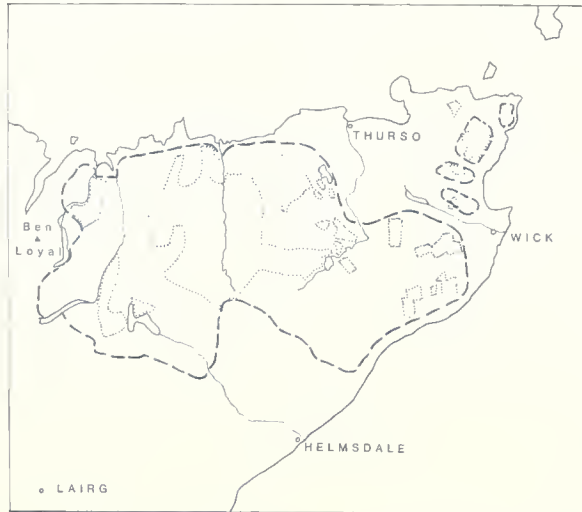
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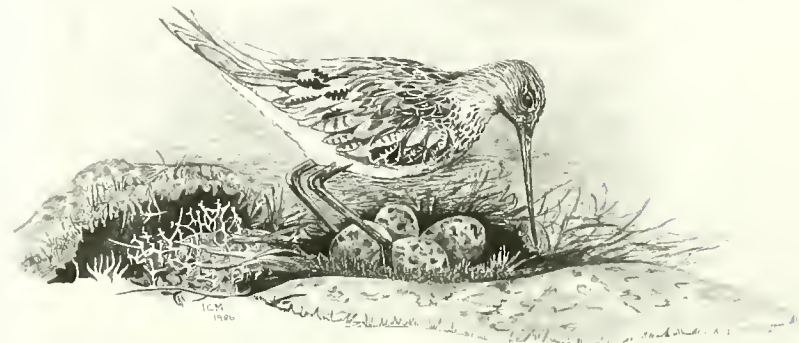
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Greenshank at the nest. Ian Macleod



# SOC News

## SOC Sponsored Birdwatch, 10th May 1986

Planning for the Sponsored Birdwatch started at a meeting of the Edinburgh Branch Committee shortly after receipt of the President's Golden Jubilee appeal letter. The Branch Chairman, William Prest, undertook to write the begging letters and the Vice-Chairman, Peter Gordon, took on the organisation. With major sponsorship forthcoming from Famous Grouse Whisky, the Royal Bank of Scotland and Shell Petroleum, random thoughts became reality and planning in earnest began.

Every branch secretary was contacted and, with two exceptions, responded positively to the idea. A somewhat different reaction was noted in an editorial in the Glasgow Herald on the 6 May, which poked mischievous fun at birdwatchers and, in particular, 'doubted whether there were 133 different sort of birds in the whole world let alone Scotland'. Was it this scurrilous piece that deterred members of the Glasgow Branch from fully supporting the effort? Better publicity was forthcoming from the BBC who promised to transmit a half-hour programme on the progress of one of the teams comprising Gordon Anderson, Ian Andrews, Alan Brown and Peter Gordon.

Most of the enthusiasts planned their day in advance to take in as many habitats as possible and took care to minimise the travelling time between venues. A typical itinerary for the Lothians included Roslin Wood; Pentlands; Threipmuir Reservoir; Cramond Brig (for lunch?); Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh; Duddingston Loch; Musselburgh; Cousland; Gosforth Bay; Aberlady; Tynninghame; Dunbar; Barns Ness and Yellowcraigs for a well earned barbecue.

The top scoring team, and winners of bottles of Famous Grouse, covered the Lothian and Borders area. They were Graham Checkley, Ray Murray, Liz and Mike Leven, who finished with a total of 127 species. They were pressed hard by the BBC Team who finished with 120 species. Other century makers came from Dumfries and Galloway, Lothian and Aberdeen. The highest individual scores (as opposed to team efforts) were recorded by John and Margaret Swallow and D. Napier; all shared a total of 106 species.

Stuart Craig (Borders) led the fund raisers with a total of £140. Others raising over £100 were Neil Millar (Aberdeen) £127.05; Bryan Hickman (Edinburgh) £119.16; William Prest (Edinburgh) £104.74. Neil Millar, who is thirteen, will receive a special prize for his efforts in the form of a voucher for the SOC Bird Bookshop. 30 individuals taking part raised over £20 and qualified for the prize draw. The winner was David Irving; his prize — only one guess allowed.

A total of 172 different species were seen during the day (Glasgow Herald please note) and a sum of £2,435.40 raised by the event. May I, on behalf of the Edinburgh Branch, thank all the members who took part and assure them that their efforts helped to make the event one of the major fund raisers in the Golden Jubilee Year. A suitable cause for celebration with a wee dram. Well done.

Peter Marriott

## Birdwatch Barbecue

The Branch was also heavily involved in the Sponsored Birdwatch when the hectic day was rounded off by a most successful barbecue and bonfire organised by Bill Paterson. Some 50 members and their families and friends made short work of the beefburgers and baked potatoes around the driftwood fire which burned well in the strong wind. The event provided an opportunity to meet other members and find out how everyone had fared in the sponsored birdwatch. Woodcocks roded overhead for those who had not ventured out at 4 a.m. to get them first on the day's list. Our thanks go to Bill for the organisation and smooth running of the evening.

Ian Andrews

## Great Fife & Kinross Bird Race

This took place on 11 May and a total of 139 species were seen. The winning team (SWT) scored 121 species, a new record for this annual event.

If any member still has sponsorship money to collect and send in, would they please do so as soon as possible, to Frank Spragge, Hessle House, Ceres, Fife. It all goes, as members will know, to the Club's Golden Jubilee Appeal.

## Well done Stranraer!

Members at the Club's southwestern outpost decided to organise a 'Bird Fayre' in aid of the Jubilee Appeal. This initiative proved highly successful, raising the handsome sum of £800. Hearty congratulations to all concerned.



White-tailed Eagle. John Love

### The Branch totals raised were:

|                        |           |
|------------------------|-----------|
| Aberdeen               | £216.05   |
| Ayr                    | £30.00    |
| Borders                | £274.71   |
| Dundee                 | £214.15   |
| Edinburgh              | £1061.35  |
| Glasgow                | £11.20    |
| New Galloway           | £10.20    |
| Stirling               | £28.02    |
| Stranraer              | £174.62   |
| Thurso                 | £21.10    |
|                        | £2,041.40 |
| Sponsorship Money      |           |
| Famous Grouse          | £172.00   |
| Royal Bank of Scotland | £172.00   |
| Shell                  | £50.00    |
|                        | £394.00   |
| Branches               | £2041.40  |
| Sponsors               | £394.00   |
| Grand Total            | £2,435.40 |

## Speyside Weekend

For their second celebration of Jubilee Year, seven members of the New Galloway Branch were joined on Speyside for the weekend of 16-18 May by nine other SOC members from as far afield as the Borders, Dumfries, Harrogate, Ayr, Edinburgh and Aviemore. After the long cold Spring, it was a relief to enjoy better weather conditions on the Saturday, but high winds on the last afternoon very nearly spoilt our chances of seeing Crested Tits and Crossbills; the birds had obviously moved to more sheltered habitats and were much more difficult to find.

Some 82 species were noted, from Ptarmigan, Grouse and Golden Plover at the higher levels down to Cuckoo, pipits, Whinchat, wagtails, finches, warblers, tits, duck, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and others. Other sightings of note were Slavonian Grebes in full breeding plumage, over 50 Pied Wagtails flying into their roost in a small conifer right beside the entrance to the hotel at Cowlumbridge quite undeterred by the close proximity of so many passers-by, and of course the famous ospreys apparently at home on their man-made nest.

This was a very happy and informal weekend for all those who made the journey north, not only because it gave us the opportunity to get to know one another a little better, but also for the chance to indulge in our favourite pastime amidst some of the most spectacular scenery in Scotland.

Jean Jacobs

## And another!

Twelve Edinburgh Branch members also enjoyed a very successful weekend on Speyside, 13-15 June, based at the new Glenfeshie Hostel which proved to have excellent facilities, provide good meals and be ideally situated for birding in this area. On Saturday, in perfect weather with bright sunshine and a cool breeze, the party split into two groups — 9 to climb onto the mountains and 3 to explore the valley below.

The plateau was reached without too much difficulty. On the way up we passed gullies filled with deep snow and these seemed to attract small parties of red deer. The reward for reaching the top was to have a deliciously refreshing drink from one of the sparkling burns and then savour the breath-taking scenery of the Cairngorms summits spread out all around us.

Being at well over 3000 feet we were of course into the fragile tundra. In this area we discovered a spanking Dotterel and not far away could see its mate sitting on a nest. Later a couple of "stones" turned out to be a pair of crouching Ptarmigan. Another pair of Dotterel flew overhead in a display flight. More red deer were seen as well as a glimpse of a Golden Eagle.

At the end of a perfect day a visit was made to a local hostelry to reflect on our good fortune. On our way home to bed a few minutes were spent watching a Goldeneye duck with 16 ducklings.

Sunday was again sunny but much warmer with no cooling breeze. The day was spent exploring the local woods and lochs to find species typical of this area, including of course Ospreys and Crested Tits. We rounded off a memorable weekend with a walk through the beautiful pine woods surrounding Loch an Eilean.

William Prest

## SOC Jubilee Cruise 14-23 May 1986

After some early drizzle, the 14 May turned into a bright and sunny, if chilly, day in Edinburgh. By late morning 11 members of the S.O.C. had joined Angus Erskine and the crew of M.V. Plancius and set off from Leith Docks for a tour of the northern Isles of Scotland. Having previously spent no more than 8 hours at sea in one go before, I was a little apprehensive! However I fared reasonably well while the weather was good. We enjoyed bright sunshine for several days but by 21 May dull drizzly weather gave way to force 10 gales, gusting to force 11! Being on St. Kilda at the time we had no choice but to wait. The winds persisted and we threw caution — and ourselves! — to the winds and headed for Greenock — a journey which several of us failed to appreciate!

Some excellent bird-watching opportunities were enjoyed at several of Europe's finest seabird colonies. Landings were made on Hoy, Westray, Papa Westray, Fair Isle, Noss, Fetlar, Hermaness, North Rona (4 members only) and St. Kilda. To give a detailed account of the birds seen over the 10-day trip would take a lot of space, so I have recorded the species on a series of site lists and deposited these in the Waterston Library.

Inevitably some birds revealed themselves to just one or two lucky members — for example a fine Golden Eagle on Hoy and superb male Snow Bunting in summer plumage on North Rona seen by a few of the more agile (or reckless?!) members, including myself. (We had to jump ashore onto wet, slippery rocks). Corncrakes were also sadly scarce, highlighting the plight of the species

and only two fortunate members heard one on Westray.

Sea-watching between islands proved productive. No fewer than 10 Great Northern Divers — 7 in Scapa Flow — plenty of Manx Shearwaters, including over 800 between North Rona and St. Kilda, 1 Leach's Petrel, 3 Storm Petrels and 2 Pomarine Skuas were among the birds observed from the decks of the Plancius.

I think I speak for everyone when I say we all had a marvellous time and enjoyed the opportunity to visit some of the less accessible of Britain's outlying islands and I would like to thank Angus Erskine of Erskine Expeditions, the Dutch Captain and crew of M.V. Plancius and the S.O.C. for all playing a part in making this trip so enjoyable.

**M. D. Crewe**

## Edinburgh Activities

At the last of the winter's Library Meetings Mike Leven, editor of the Lothian Bird Report, detailed the events of 1985, which by any standards was an exceptional year for the Lothians, with five new species added to the Region's list. Also above average numbers of Pomarine Skuas, Little Auks, Mediterranean Gulls, Black Redstarts, Bluethroats and Red-backed Shrikes were reported. We eagerly await the appearance of the 1985 Lothian Bird Report!

Speakers at our annual members' night also presented the results of 1985 fieldwork, this time the national Heron survey (Mick Marquiss) and our local Ring Ouzel survey (Ian Poxton). Many man-hours of walking in the Pentland, Moorfoot and Lammermuir Hills had located 141 Ring Ouzel sites, the majority in

the latter two ranges.

Field work was again underway by mid April with a local survey of breeding Great Crested and Little Grebes and Tufted Ducks organised by Allan Brown of the Branch's Discussion Group. The aim is to visit all the local ponds, lochs and reservoirs during the breeding season. Great Crested Grebes have been censused at regular intervals, but the data collected will provide a base line for our knowledge of Little Grebe and Tufted Duck numbers.

## Birds and beasts

A weekend of serendipity was experienced by six members of the St. Andrew's Branch who spent June 6-8 at Kiltarlity, Inverness-shire, where we were made very welcome at Brockie Lodge, our host being an SOC member. The success of the trip was largely due to the enthusiastic and kindly leadership of Malcolm Harvey to whom we again extend our thanks.

On Saturday we were happy to welcome a member of the Inverness Branch on our visit to Glen Strathfarrar. Here the eagles were most forthcoming and the singing Wood Warblers vied with the Pied Flycatchers and Crested Tits for our attention. Early risers on Sunday were rewarded by Great Spotted Woodpeckers and a Pine Marten but the chief part of the morning was spent with Slavonian Grebes and Otters, the latter obligingly leaving their tracks behind them.

The list of birds seen was good, but seeing them in such a beautiful setting was memorable.

**Betty Rowling**



## Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay — Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist — almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc.

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## Visiting St. Kilda

The name St. Kilda always arouses interest. Most people are aware that it was evacuated some time ago and that the army do 'something' there, while SOC members will all know it is famous for its breeding seabirds. This article looks at St. Kilda from the viewpoint of the ordinary visitor and describes how the NTS work parties operate, as these are the only realistic way most people have of getting to the islands.

Ownership of St. Kilda was accepted in 1957, transfer coinciding with the decision to establish a missile-tracking station there. In April that year "Operation Hard Rock" started and an RAF construction force landed on Hirta. Originally the ruined houses were to be demolished and used as hard core for the road, but fortunately a quarry was opened to meet this need. NTS work parties were started as an ideal way of both preserving the buildings and allowing enthusiasts to visit the islands for 2-week holidays. Since 1957 the church has been restored, five cottages have been re-roofed, and the ruins of others have been stabilised to prevent further deterioration. One of the cottages is used as a common-room cum dining room, two are dormitories, one is a fine museum/information centre, and the fifth is a store. The living quarters are basic but comfortable, with spring beds and background electric heating. The separate toilet block has adequate facilities, including showers. All this is a far cry from conditions for the first groups, who lived in tents and cooked over gas or paraffin stoves.

Several work parties are arranged each summer, between early May and mid August. Groups leave Oban on Saturday afternoon and arrive on St. Kilda 24 hours later — weather permitting! Calls at Canna or Lochmaddy help to minimise discomfort but the best possible conditions are desirable when crossing the 40 miles of open ocean between the Sound of Harris and St. Kilda. The boat journey does much to forge the party into a team ready to tackle the job ahead and is itself an exciting part of the holiday. Porpoises swim at the bows, whales are occasionally spotted, petrels, Manx Shearwaters and skuas are a common sight, and Great and Sooty Shearwaters are sometimes present in late summer. On the return journey the boat usually sails between Boreray and the stacs to give a spectacular view of the Gannet colony — at about 60,000 pairs this is the largest colony in the world.

Arrival at Hirta can be dramatic. Mist often obscures the island until the boat sails into the calmer waters of Village Bay and Connachair is seen rising steeply behind the line of cottages. The scale of St. Kilda is not easy to comprehend; in places Hirta's spectacular cliffs drop almost 500m straight to the sea — and are said to continue vertically for the same distance underwater. There is an overall impression of freshness, due to the cleanliness of rainwashed stone and the sight of green vegetation after so much sea. The white army buildings come as a visual shock — but the work parties do depend on the military for use of boats, electricity and recreational facilities, including the famous Puff Inn Bar.

Work party members are asked to work for

up to four hours per day, but in practice the task is completed by working as long as is necessary. If a specialised job has to be done a skilled person can usually be placed on a work party but it is amazing what can be accomplished by inexperienced enthusiasts willing to "have a go". Tasks include clearing ditches and doing general maintenance work, counting sheep and helping the warden to catch birds. Recently a party of dry stone dykers repaired some of the dykes and cleits, which are often wind-damaged during winter. There are 1000 or so cleits — beehive structures used as stores for peat, birds and crops — on Hirta and many are in a bad state of repair.

Full advantage is taken of good weather to explore the island and study the wildlife. Visitors are normally restricted to Hirta due to transport difficulties, but NTS parties usually land on Dun for a closer view of the Puffin colony and some lucky individuals get to Boreray or the stacs. The islands are, of course, famous for seabirds, the St. Kilda Wren and Mouse, and the flock of Soay sheep. The sheep, at one time restricted to Soay but introduced to Hirta in 1932, are the subject of a long-term study and are left to their own devices with a minimum of interference from man. The population varies from c500-1800 depending on lambing success and winter death rate.

The St. Kilda mouse is bigger and heavier than the mainland subspecies and is fairly easily seen. Early army personnel had to be warned that the mice must not be trapped, no matter how many chocolate bars they nibbled! The Wrens are also easy to see but are difficult



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to photograph; early morning is the best time to hear them singing from the chimney tops. Their song differs from that of mainland birds, being faster and higher pitched. There are about 100 pairs on the St. Kilda group.

The islands hold the largest (and oldest) Fulmar colony in Britain with about 45,000 pairs. They can be easily viewed as they glide effortlessly several hundred feet above the sea but level with your eyes and camera. They do seem to fly for the fun of it! The Puffin population is even larger, estimated at about 300,000 pairs, approximately half of the UK population. The main colony is on Dun, which most parties manage to visit, courtesy of the Army. Landing is tricky but is easily accomplished with the aid of a fixed rope when the sea is calm. The vegetation on Dun is lush, due to the absence of sheep, and it is important to keep to the path to avoid stumbling through Puffin burrows. When the chicks leave their burrows in August they fly in their hundreds towards the lights of the camp, making it very easy to catch and ring them.

One of the highlights of a trip to St. Kilda must be a night visit to Carn Mor, a boulder field below the face of Mullach Bi. It is best to go down before sunset and view the wheeling flight of hundreds of Puffins. Eventually they retire to their burrows and, after dusk, especially if the sky is overcast or the night moonless, Manx Shearwaters begin calling. It can be a shock to suddenly hear their cries from under your feet! Soon the returning birds crash-land among the rocks and shuffle to their burrows. It is understandable that the Vikings thought that some islands with Shearwater colonies were inhabited by Trolls!

The fluttering flight and more delicate calls of Storm or Leach's Petrels add to this unique experience, which is perhaps the most memorable of the many wildlife-watching opportunities that reward visitors to St. Kilda.

**Nick Aitken**

*Stac an Armin with Boreray beyond.  
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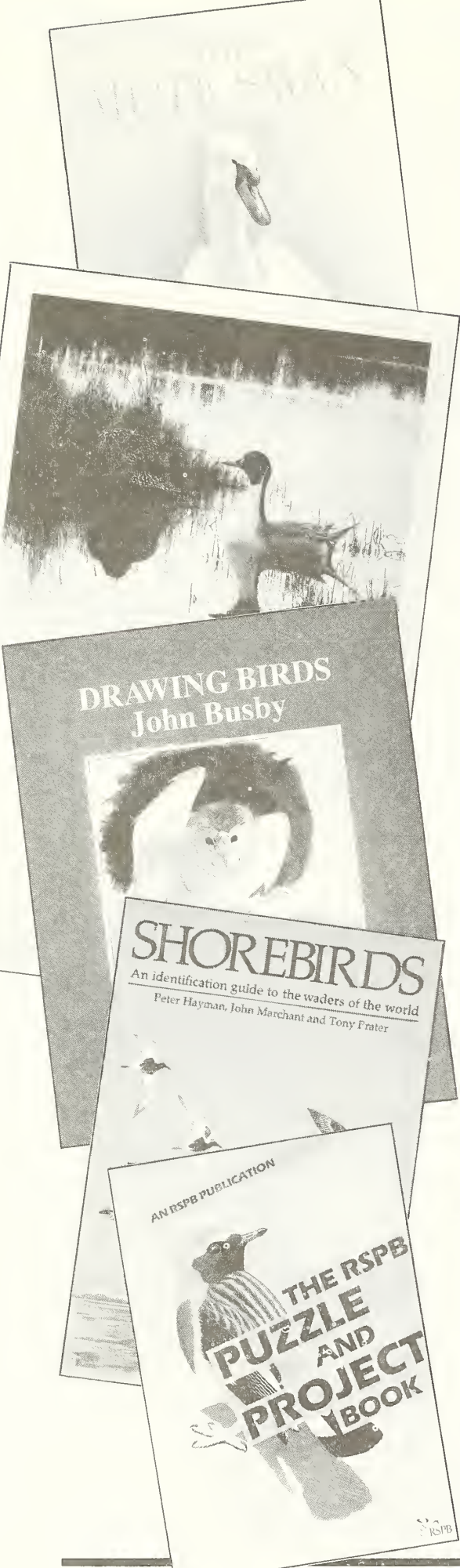
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Both puzzles and projects have been taken from the Young Ornithologists' Club magazine, *Bird life*. The projects have been taken arranged in monthly order and some can be easily carried out at home. Others are national projects organised by the YOC. Altogether, this book will provide a lot of fun for all the family.

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# Croom Helm

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# Review

**Nature Conservation and Afforestation in Britain**, by the Nature Conservancy Council; 1986; 108pp, many colour plates, 14 maps, 4 tables; £8.50.

Over the last 60 years, through a policy developed because of war-time shortages of timber, 2½ million acres of Britain have been planted with conifers. Initially there was little opposition to this, but increasingly people are aware of losses to wildlife, and to familiar open places and hill ground.

In the last 10 years, the voice of concern has grown louder, despite the assurances of the foresters that "forests are good for birds", "we are simply restoring the forest cover that once was here". To the layman these comments have a naïve and simplistic appeal, and it is sometimes not easy to present a true picture of the effects of forestry without well marshalled arguments and specific and detailed facts.

Now at last the Nature Conservancy Council has produced a comprehensive review of the evidence of the effects of forestry, not only on birds but on all wildlife in Britain, and on the environments in which they live. The picture which is painted is far from comforting. Forestry has increasingly moved on to higher, poorer and remoter ground: just that most valuable for conservation, exemplified by the afforestation of Sutherland and Caithness, and the moorland wildlife suffers. Wisely, the NCC have not stopped at a review of the effects; they point out the changes needed to enable wildlife to keep its proper place amongst farming and forestry in the British countryside. The needs for proper consultation and a rational approach to forestry expansion are clearly explained, and one is left in no doubt that there is a case to answer.

This review is already destined to be a milestone for conservation. Its real success, however, depends on the reaction of politicians, both to it and to the growing public concern about the effects of forestry on our wildlife and landscapes.

Ian Bainbridge

**George Lodge: Artist Naturalist** edited by John Savory; Croom Helm; 1986; 118 pp; 48 colour and 73 black & white illustrations; £25.

On account of his association with David Bannerman and the great Scottish publishing house of Oliver and Boyd, the name of George Lodge and his talent as an artist are particularly well known in Scotland. Yet, apart from his obituaries, little has been recorded about Lodge himself. His *Memoirs of an Artist Naturalist* was a disappointing book with little or no biographical material, while Mullens and Kirke Swann did not grant him a separate entry although giving full recognition to both his brother R. B. Lodge and Archibald Thorburn.

John Savory therefore does a great service in editing what is in effect a symposium on Lodge and his work. Bannerman died in 1979 but he had already prepared a biography in anticipation of such a book being published. This adds greatly to our knowledge of Lodge's life and broad interests, which included taxidermy, falconry, shooting and deer stalking.

George Lodge was originally trained as a wood engraver, at which he excelled, and there is no doubt that some of his finest work lay in this field, but wood engraving was a slow and costly process which had to be superseded. The history of change in methods

of book illustration during Lodge's lifetime is here described in a scholarly chapter by Christine Jackson. His introduction to falconry was through his art and of course the two were always closely associated, as is apparent from his paintings.

This is an important book in the field of natural history art, beautifully produced, for which we are grateful to John Savory and his contributors.

Ian Durance Pennie

**Birds, Men and Books — A Literary History of Ornithology** by Peter Tate; Henry Sotheran Ltd; 1986; 193 pp; 8 pp photos; £13.95.

Do not be put off by the first few pages of this book, in which the bare bones of the naturalists of Tudor and earlier times are exhumed. Once past this I found the book fascinating reading and hard to put down. There are interesting and lively accounts of the lives and works of some seventy ornithologists from John Ray and Francis Willughby to Peter Scott and David Lack. Not least interesting are their relationships, amicable or otherwise, with their contemporaries in the bird world. There were bitter battles over avian nomenclature and the final acceptance of trinomials, and even, one learns, a 'Sparrow War' in the United States!

W. G. Harper

**A tour of British bird reserves**; by Valerie Russell; Crowood Press; 1986; 191 pp., many colour and black & white photos; £12.95.

I am at a loss to know why this was written. There are c.50 "personal accounts" of visits to reserves. "A few linnets were flitting around and a dunnock popped in and out of the undergrowth — but we did not see any of the yellowhammers recorded in this area," is a typical sentence. Guillemot is spelled wrongly throughout, among other errors. Photographs are plentiful, and mostly good, with the notable exception of a sick looking Gannet on p.49.

Stan da Prato

# Short Reviews

**Bird Behaviour** by R. Burton; Granada; 1985; 224 pp; many colour photographs; £10.95.

This book is packed with beautiful colour photographs illustrating many aspects of bird behaviour. Ten chapters range over courtship, flight, feeding, senses and much more. A book for the amateur to enjoy and the professional to use.

**Islands of Birds; A Guide to Orkney Birds** by E. Meek; RSPB; 1985; 40 pp; many colour photographs, line drawings and map; £1.60.

A colourful and enjoyable guide to the birds of the Orkney Islands with a section on each island followed by lists of Orkney bird names, breeding birds and non-breeding birds.

**Life of the Woodpecker** by A. F. Smith; Croom Helm; 1986; 136 pp; 60 colour illustrations; £45.

A beautifully illustrated book covering all aspects of woodpecker life from nesting to death.

# SOC Notices

## Club Policy Review

Twenty-five members, representing a wide variety of areas and interests, met at Regent Terrace on Saturday 12 July to discuss the club's future. The discussion ranged from how to spread good ideas from individual branches to the others, to longer term topics such as the Club's name — does the word "ornithologist" put people off? — and the future of 21 Regent Terrace, which is an exceptionally expensive building to maintain. Anyone who could not attend still has plenty of time to make their ideas known as one of the decisions of the meeting was to report back to branches where it is hoped further discussion will take place, all leading to a report to be presented to the AGM in November.

## Coming shortly

Both a *Checklist of Scottish Birds* and a *Field List* (of the commoner species) are in course of preparation, for publication by the SOC. It is hoped that they will be ready in time for the Jubilee Conference.

## Changes of address

The wildfowl count organiser for Dumfries and Galloway, Paul Shimmings, has moved to The Bungalow, Steilston Farm, Stepford Road, Dunscore, Dumfries-shire.

Pete Ellis has also moved — see Recent Reports.

## Back numbers wanted

Anyone with unwanted back numbers of *Scottish Birds* or *Scottish Bird News* is invited to donate them to the Club for resale. They could be handed in to 21, brought to the Conference, given to a Branch Secretary or member of Council to pass on, or posted. Some back numbers of *Scottish Birds* are in particular demand, for completion of sets, but all will be welcomed.

## Dundee Branch Field Trips

Sunday, 19 October, 1986: Tay Survey. Leader — Bruce Lynch.

Sunday, 23 November, 1986: Sidlaw Lochs. Leader — Bede Pounder.

Sunday, 14 December, 1986: Tentsmuir Forest & Morton Lochs. Leader — Dave Thompson.

Sunday, 18 January, 1987: Carnoustie/Barry Coast. Leader — Steve Fulford.

Sunday, 15 February, 1987: St. Andrews area. Leader — I. G. Cumming.

Sunday, 15 March, 1987: Meikleour area. Leader — J. Duncan.

Sunday, 19 April, 1987: Loch of Lowes & Mill Dam. Leader — A. Barclay.

## Photographic Competition

Remember that entries must be in by Monday, 29 September.

## St. Andrews Branch Field Trips

Saturday, 20 September, 1986: Isle of May. Meet Crail Harbour 12.15 p.m. Previous booking with Wendy Mattingley, Tayport 552401 essential.

Saturday, 15 October, 1986: Fife Ness. Meet Kilminning 10.00 a.m.

Sunday, 16 November 1986: Cameron Reservoir. Evening goose watch. Meet Car Park 2.00 p.m.

Saturday, 13 December, 1986: Leven. Waders & Ducks. Meet Car Park 10.00 a.m.



## SOC Notices

### Subscriptions 1986/87

Members are reminded that subscriptions are due for renewal on or before 1st October. Those members who don't pay their subscriptions by Banker's Order will find a Subscription Renewal Form enclosed with this issue of *Scottish Bird News*. Please complete the form and send it with your remittance to Pat Webster, the Membership Secretary, as soon as possible. The cost of issuing subscription reminders is considerable, so prompt renewal is greatly appreciated.

### Jubilee Conference & AGM

The Jubilee Conference and 50th AGM of the Club will be held during the weekend of the 31st October - 2nd November in the Marine Hotel, North Berwick, East Lothian. The conference theme is "Fifty Years of Scottish Ornithology". Full details of the conference programme, booking form and AGM agenda are enclosed with this issue of *SBN*.

### New Honorary Members

In recognition of their distinguished service to the Club and Scottish ornithology, Council has elected Prof George Dunnet, Mr Andrew Macmillan and Dr. Adam Watson honorary members of the Club. George Dunnet is Regius Professor of Natural History at the University of Aberdeen and head of Culterty Field Station. His studies of Fulmars during 35 years of fieldwork on Eynhallow in the Orkneys are well known. Prof Dunnet was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours this year for his work as chairman of the Shetland Oil Terminal Advisory Group (SOTEAG).

Andrew Macmillan is a past President of the Club (1975-78) and edited *Scottish Birds* for eight years in the sixties. He is by profession an accountant and works for Melroses, the well-known tea and coffee merchants. Dr. Adam Watson works for the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Banchory and is a world authority on grouse. He is also an expert on the Cairngorms, having written two books on the area — one on natural history and scenery (with Desmond Nethersole-Thompson) and the other the Scottish Mountaineering Club district guide.

### The Bird Bookshop

The new 1986/87 catalogue is now available to Club members. Remember, besides getting the best bird and natural history books post and packing free, buying books from your Bookshop helps the Club's funds as well. Write or telephone (031-556 6042) now to ensure your free catalogue.

### Endowment Fund Grants

This year 12 grants totalling £1,700 were awarded to Club members, branches and ringing groups for research projects. Applications for 1987 grants must be submitted by 31 December on forms available from John Davies, the Club Secretary.

### 21 Regent Terrace

The repairs and maintenance to 21 Regent Terrace continued during the summer with Phase 2 work on the rear elevation. Phase 3, the front elevation, is planned for next spring/summer. That will complete the work on the outside of the house; then we start on the inside!

### British Birds

The independent monthly journal for every birdwatcher is again available at a special concessionary rate for Club members — £18.00 instead of the personal subscription rate of £24.00. Further details of this well-known and recommended journal and a subscription order form can be found in the enclosed leaflet.

### Scottish Bird Report 1985

At the time of writing (late June) it seems likely that the 1985 *SBR* will continue as a separate publication this year. It had been planned to include the *SBR* in the December issue of *Scottish Birds*. Due to the large number of papers and articles being submitted to the new *Scottish Birds*, this looks like being impractical. So the 1985 *SBR* will probably be sent free as promised to all paid-up members in November.

### "Fife for Birds"

The St. Andrews Branch is holding a one-day symposium on Saturday, 4th October 1986 at the Buchanan Theatre, University St., St. Andrews. Speakers include Bernie Zonfrillo on the Isle of May, Jean Horobin on Bird Habitats in Fife, Jim Cobb on Fife for Migrants, Jeff Graves on ornithological research at St. Andrew's University and Frank Spragge on Lochore Meadows Nature Reserve. There will also be a "Brains Trust", displays and competitions. The cost is £4.00 per person. For further details and bookings, write to Frank Spragge, Hessel House, Ceres, Fife KY15 5LS.

### Jubilee Poster

To celebrate the Club's Jubilee, a 4-colour art poster (24" x 16") featuring a superb colour photograph of a Golden Eagle has been produced. The poster was designed by Lorna Elliott of Dundee Art College and the photograph is by Club member Don Smith FRPS.

The poster is being used to publicise the Club and is also available to members. It costs £1.95 (inc p&p) and is obtainable from the SOC (Poster), 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

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## SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £50. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £1 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Jacquie Clark, Business Editor, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

## Deadlines

*SBN* is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 October for the December number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries — and suggestions — will be welcomed by the Editor (Tel. 0738-23508). Information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in *SB* 14(1).

## SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

|                                            |                         |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Adult                                      | £10.00                  |
| Junior (under 18 or student under 25)      | £4.00                   |
| Family (husband, wife & children under 18) | £14.50                  |
| Life, individual                           | £200.00, family £300.00 |
| Pensioner individual                       | £6.00, family £8.50     |

Further details from Membership Secretary, Miss Pat Webster, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

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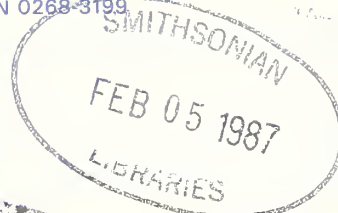
THE SCOTTISH  
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

# Scottish Bird News

December 1986

ISSN 0268-3199

No. 4



Edited by Valerie Thom  
assisted by Stanley da Prato

## The 1986 Breeding Season in Scotland

Which birds are doing well, and which seem to be declining, is a common topic of conversation among birdwatchers, and most of us will have made such comments over the years. However impressions can be misleading and a standardised system of recording bird activity from year to year is needed before we can quantify changes in the number of our commoner species. This short (and inevitably patchy) review of the 1986 breeding season draws on data from the well-established techniques currently in use for monitoring certain groups of species.

### Birds of farms, woods and waterways

The Common Bird Census and the Waterways Bird Survey organized by the British Trust for Ornithology enjoy a world-wide reputation for the way they use a network of amateur fieldworkers to monitor most of the common species of farmland and woodland. We shall be publishing an article on how the CBC/WBS operate in Scotland in a forthcoming issue. In this issue we present the comments of the fieldworkers themselves, in advance of the analysis which will appear in BTO News in 1987. Not all species and habitats are covered by the CBC or WBS, nor are all observers able to participate in the schemes, so we are also happy to incorporate information from other surveys.

#### Cool, wet and windy

The one comment that *everyone* made about 1986 was the weather. It was a cool, damp and generally late spring from Shetland to the Solway. Many observers commented on birds being later to start nesting and laying replacement clutches after the failure of earlier attempts. Ground nesting birds are particularly vulnerable to weather and several observers reported a reduction in species such as Mute Swan, Mallard, Lapwing, Curlew, Oystercatcher and Snipe. Birds of prey have their own slot in *SBN* but it is noteworthy that species such as Tawny Owl, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel did badly in 1986 in some areas.

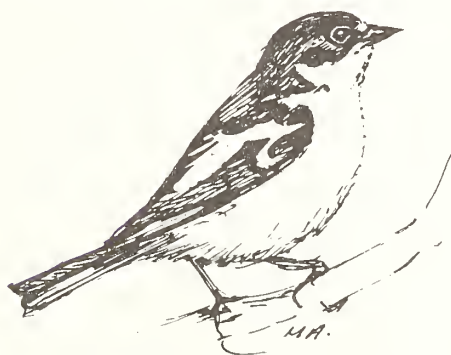
#### Mink the culprits

Weather is not the only factor that can depress bird numbers. Several observers, ranging from Galloway to Angus, reported that feral Mink had devastated populations of water birds, especially Moorhens and Dippers. Observers reporting good numbers of Moorhen were often those in areas where Mink are scarce or absent, for example at Aberlady Bay Nature Reserve, where a trapping programme intercepts any Mink that try to colonize the Reserve. Mink are undoubtedly here to stay but the idea that a balance will be struck between the native fauna and the aliens is not one that currently appeals to many Scottish ornithologists. A further problem for river birds

in some upland areas is stream acidification, currently being investigated in Galloway, where many Dippers have been laying infertile eggs.

#### Slow recovery

Of the thrushes and chats some east coast observers report an increase in Robins and speculate whether some of the birds involved in the big spring falls had stayed to try and breed. Stonechats continue to make a painfully slow recovery in several areas but many other insectivorous species such as tits and Treecreepers, seem to be down. One surprise in the Lothians was the increase in Long-tailed Tits, reputedly one of the most cold sensitive species on the British list, one two census plots. Redstart numbers were up slightly on several plots and one study reports more second broods than in 1985. This observer also reports a 7% rise in Pied Flycatchers — but unusually late, small clutches. Fledging success was good and the problem was clearly shortage of food for the laying females.



Pied Flycatcher. Mike Ashley

#### Events in Africa

Of the long distance migrants a welcome improvement in Sand Martin numbers was noted by many correspondents, though the species is still well below its pre 1969 strength. There were several worrying reports of declines in House Martin colonies, while many Swallows seem to have reared fewer

chicks than average — hardly surprising for a species that is so dependent on settled weather to produce flying insects. Another aerial feeder, the Nightjar, was down in numbers on Arran, one of its few Scottish strongholds.

#### Warblers' mixed fortunes

The two warblers most affected by the drought in the Sahel zone of Africa, the Sedge Warbler and Common Whitethroat, made slight recoveries or held their own on several census plots; as with Sand Martin, however, both species have a long way to go to recover from the crashes of the last 15 years. Populations of the other *Sylvia* warblers are much healthier with a continued increase in Lesser Whitethroats reported from several areas outside their stronghold in the Lothians. The situation with Grasshopper Warblers is less optimistic, though this is a notoriously under censused species. Willow Warblers declined on some plots, while there were fewer Wood Warblers in oakwoods in the south east (where the species is rather marginal) but not, apparently, further west.

#### Finches, sparrows and buntings

Finches seem to be enjoying mixed fortunes throughout Scotland with ups and downs recorded for the same species by different observers. Although not an easy species to census, there is some evidence that Tree Sparrows are declining. House Sparrows are not covered by the CBC and, being so familiar, no-one seems to bother to count them! It could be interesting to know just what is, or isn't, happening to one of our most familiar species. Yellowhammers are doing well, at least in those areas where clearance of scrub is not removing much of their habitat (though they dropped by half on one northern farm) but declines have been recorded in Reed Buntings on some plots. One bunting which undoubtedly is in serious trouble in many parts of Scotland is the Corn Bunting, which many observers fear could soon become extinct over much of its former Scottish range.

**THANKS** to D Butterfield, Martin Cook, Roger Durman, Mr & Mrs Colin Edwards, Bob Furness, Peter Gordon, Mike Harris, Brian Hickman, Angus Hogg, Martin Holmes, John Hunt (RSPB), Alex Joss, P J Knowling, Donnie Macdonald, Nick Riddiford, Henry Robb, Mr and Mrs D Robertson, Geoff Shaw, Bob Smith, Sarah Wanless and Derrick Warner for their comments and Pat Webster for her typing.

**APOLOGIES** to anyone who sent in information after we went to press — next year we should be much better organised and there will be more time to send in your comments.

Compiled by Susan & Stan da Prato

## Editorial

The appearance of *SBN4* and *SB14* (2) completes the first year of our re-vamped publications, making this an appropriate moment at which to look back over the last 12 months and take stock of the situation. At the Editorial end it has been a hectic, but in general rewarding, year. We knew that a lot of hard work would be needed to get things going — but we had not anticipated quite as many hiccups as arose along the way. On the credit side, however, there is considerable satisfaction to be derived from seeing a publication through from the start to its eventual appearance (almost) on time and looking (more or less) as intended!

In our last Editorial, in *SB 13* (8), we pointed out that a magazine like *SBN* is heavily dependent upon a steady supply of voluntary contributions from members. You have done us proud so far! Although initially doubts were cast on our ability to fill 8 pages per issue we have, in fact, received sufficient material for two 12 page and two 16 page issues. Some articles have, of course, been asked for, but there has been a gratifying flow of unsolicited bird notes, branch reports and so on. We feel fairly confident that the mix of items in *SBN* is about right, but would welcome members' comments — whether supporting or contradicting our own view. Should we perhaps include a 'Dear Editor' column? — or an occasional quiz or competition? — or more about fieldwork currently in progress? Members who attend Branch meetings have already had an opportunity to discuss this whole question, among others, but only a comparatively small proportion of the membership is involved in Branch activities. It is important that we should also hear the views of members for whom our publications are the only regular contact with the Club.

With *SB*, too, we have been encouraged by the number and standard of the papers submitted. The new format and production technique have enabled us to present many thousand more words, in a more visually interesting layout, than was previously possible. We will be particularly interested to hear members' reactions to the 1985 *Scottish Bird Report*, once again incorporated into *SB*. Since *SB* is the repository for material considered to be of significant future reference value, it can be argued that this is the right place for *SBR*. But what do you, the members, think? Let us know, please, so that the Editorial Committee can take into account the views of the wider membership when deciding what to do next year.

Many of the teething troubles inevitably involved in any change in the style of a publication — and in this case the changes affected not only the style and content but also layout, production techniques and printer — have hopefully been sorted out. But that is not to say that crises are unlikely to occur in the future. One thing has certainly become clear — that the responsibilities for editing and supervising the production of our publications need to be spread more widely. As a first step towards achieving this, the editorship of *SBN* will undergo a 'role reversal' in the next number, with Stan da Prato becoming senior editor and V.M.T. assistant.

And finally — an Editorial thank you to all who contributed towards the content, illustration and production of *SBN* and *SB* (including *SBR*!) in 1986.

## SOC News

### "Fife for Birds" Symposium

As its main contribution to the Club's Golden Jubilee and to draw attention to Fife's richness of bird life, the St Andrews Branch organised an "informal symposium" on October 4th.

In his opening remarks Dr John Berry paid tribute to the former doyennes of Scottish ornithology, Fifers Dr Baxter and Miss Rintoul. Bernard Zonfrillo followed by describing the founding of Scotland's first observatory on the Isle of May, and its tremendous seabird colonies. Jean Horobin then reviewed Fife's wide variety of bird habitat, while Jim Cobb gave us a thought-provoking talk on the complexities of migration and described the habitat development work he has been undertaking for many years at Fife Ness.

After lunch Jeff Graves and Peter Slater told us about some of the research work currently being done at St Andrews University, singling out work on Herring Gulls, Puffins and Chaffinches from many projects, and Frank Spragge turned the spotlight on West Fife by illustrating the evolution of Lochore Meadows Country Park as a birdwatchers' mecca under the title "Silk Purse out of Sow's ear." The day ended with a Brains Trust when a panel of experts answered questions ranging from the problems of geese on farmland to planting gardens for birds.

The Bird Bookshop made a welcome appearance and a "Name That Bird" photograph competition was won by Keith Brockie. Sixty-five souls attended: we hope that all went home satisfied.

E. F. B. Spragge



Herring Gull. David Mitchell

### Dundee Jubilee Dinner

It is indeed unusual to attend any function involving upwards of 50 and not hear a single dissident voice; but that is what the Dundee Branch achieved on 18 September. A plentiful and delicious meal was followed by an excellent speech by Jeremy Greenwood, whose wife Cynthia cut the celebration cake — complete with authentic (and edible) Crested Tit. And the slide show of former SOC days, arranged by Bede Pounder, caused much amusement. Thanks to all who helped to make this an altogether fantastic evening. Let's hope the centenary dinner will be as good!

Vincent Ellmore

### New SOC publications

THE two new booklets referred to in *SBN3* are now with the printer and should be available early in December. The annotated *SOC Check List of Scottish Birds* will sell at 95p and the *SOC Field List of Scottish Birds* at 45p, both inclusive of postage and packing. Bulk supplies will be available for sale through the Branches.

## kindrogan FIELD CENTRE PROGRAMME 1987



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# Recent Reports

*These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland, via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period July to September is covered here.*

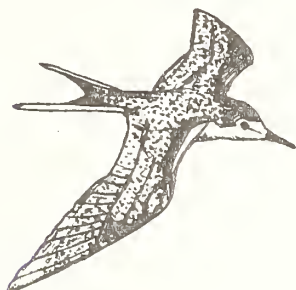
The early autumn was notable for its lack of easterly winds and consequent scarcity of drifted migrants. Only 2 small arrivals occurred, one in late August and the other in late September, otherwise the wind blew inexorably west. Despite the generally unfavourable weather, Fair Isle came up trumps with several extreme rarities.

An early **Great Northern Diver** was at Gullane on 20th September, whilst **Red-necked Grebes** reached a maximum of 36 at Gosford in August. **Blue Fulmars** appeared at a few east coast sites, including 11 off Fair Isle on 12th September. A **Cory's Shearwater** was off St. Abbs in August and a **Great Shearwater** off Fair Isle in September. **Sooty Shearwaters** were seen off several sites, but the only large movements were 50 off Fife Ness on 23rd August and 200 off Birsay on 30th September. Record numbers of **Manx Shearwaters** were seen in the Forth, including 4500 in 3 hours off Musselburgh on 26th August. Two **Balearic Shearwaters** were off Turnberry on 7th September. At Collieston 94 **Storm Petrels** and 10 **Leach's Petrels** were caught using tape lures in August, whilst 2 **Leach's Petrels** were seen off Turnberry on 7th September. A **Glossy Ibis** was in Orkney in September and a **Spoonbill** was on the Ythan in July.

The first 45 **Pink-footed Geese** were at Meikle Loch on 11th September, although 2 possibly injured or escaped birds were at Aberlady in August. The first **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were back in Lewis on 20th September and 49 **Greylags** were at Eyemouth on 29th September. **Barnacle Geese** appeared at a number of east coast sites with 110 at Peterhead and 310 at Aberlady in late September. Pale-bellied **Brent Geese** appeared in unusual numbers at several sites in early September, with 22 at Kirkwall, 1 in Harris, 6 in South Uist, 10 at Tarbat Ness, 87 at Inverness and a maximum of 15 at Cramond. An immature male **American Wigeon** on Fair Isle in late September was incredibly tame and spent all its time with a domestic duck, but it had been ringed in the USA. A **Garganey** was at Irvine and 2 **Blue-winged Teal** on North Ronaldsay in September. A **Red-crested Pochard** summered at the mouth of the Ness. Three **Surf Scoters** were at Lunan Bay and 2 immature male **King Eiders** at Sumburgh Head into September.

A **Sea Eagle** was seen in Harris in August and an **Osprey** was at Strathbeg in July, when a **Quail** was at Ludquarn. Single **Spotted Crakes** were on Out Skerries and Fair Isle in August and a **Crane** at Gretna in September. An **Avocet** was on the Ythan in July and a **Collared Pratincole** at Kinneil in August. **Dotterel** were seen on South Uist in August and Fair Isle in September. **Little Stints** were very scarce, with singles at 5 sites, 2 in North Uist, 2 on the Beaully Firth, a maximum of 3 at Aberlady and 2 at Tynninghame. A **White-rumped Sandpiper** was at Cramond on 7th September and a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Newburgh, Aberdeenshire on 28th September. **Curlew Sandpipers** were also scarce, with 2 in Orkney and a maximum of 3 at Aber-

lady on 21st September. A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was on South Uist on 1st August. Reasonable numbers of **Ruff** appeared at a number of sites in mid August including 46 at the Loons, 9 on the Beaully Firth, 40 at Meikle Loch and 48 at Kinneil. **Whimbrel** reached a peak of 63 at Musselburgh on 6th September. **Spotted Redshank** were widespread, including 2 in Shetland, 1 on Fair Isle, 4 in Orkney, 2 on the Beaully Firth, 7 on the Ythan, 2 in Fife, a maximum of 5 at Aberlady on 20th August with at least 3 others in East Lothian. Good numbers of **Greenshank** also occurred, with 23 on the Ythan on 10th August. At least 7 **Green Sandpipers** were seen in Shetland with 10 on Fair Isle, 1 on South Uist, 5 in Aberdeenshire, 3 in Fife and 6 in East Lothian. There were two **Wood Sandpipers** in Shetland, 2 in Orkney, 1 at Longside and 2 in Fife. A **Red-necked Phalarope** was on Fair Isle on 31st August.



Sooty Tern

One or two **Pomarine Skuas** were seen at 12 sites, whilst up to 8 summered on the Beaully Firth, 20 were seen off Noss Head, 15 in the Minch, 6 off Tarbat Ness, 4 off Mallaig, 12 off Kinshaldy and 5 off the Gardyloo in the Forth. Large numbers of **Arctic Skuas** appeared in the Forth, including 210 off Barns Ness in 6 hours on 26th August, when 89 were off Musselburgh, 97 off Hound Point and 100 off Fife Ness the following day. The only **Long-tailed Skua** was off North Ronaldsay on 8th July. **Mediterranean Gulls** were seen on the Don at Aberdeen in July and August and at Tayport. There were **Little Gulls** at Sandness and 4 off North Ronaldsay, with small numbers off Aberdeenshire and East Lothian, mainly in September and a record of a **Sooty Tern** on the Don on 7th September, will, if accepted, be only the third Scottish record. A **Black Tern** was also on the Don in August and singles were seen at 2 sites in Fife and 3 in East Lothian. An adult **White-winged Black Tern** was at Wormit in August.

A **Hoopoe** was on Unst in September and although a large fall of **Wrynecks** occurred on the east coast of England in August, only 5 were reported from 4 sites in Scotland.

Fair Isle had a **Short-toed Lark** on 27th September and single **Richard's Pipits** were seen there, on Out Skerries and on North Ronaldsay in September. On 7th September 900 **House Martins** passed over the Hirsell in 3-4 minutes. A **Citrine Wagtail** was on Fair Isle on 20th August and one or two more were at Sumburgh on 21st September. A **Thrush Nightingale** was on Fair Isle on 20th August. Two **Bluthroats** were on Out Skerries on 23rd September and 2 others were also seen in Shetland, with 2 on Fair Isle and 6 on North Ronaldsay and singles at Fife Ness and on the Isle of May in September. The only **Black**

**Redstart** was on Fair Isle on 1st July. Early **Fieldfares** were on North Ronaldsay on 3rd August, with 16 on Coldingham Moor on 3rd September.

Fair Isle produced a **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** on 26th September, a **Grasshopper Warbler** on 17th September, an **Aquatic Warbler** on 7th August and a **Paddyfield Warbler** on 26th September. Fair Isle also had 4 **Marsh Warblers**, with another on North Ronaldsay. The north isles also had a scattering of **Reed Warblers** including 5 on Out Skerries from 15th-18th August. Three **Icterine Warblers** were seen in Shetland in August when 3 were on Fair Isle, 1 on North Ronaldsay and 1 at Crimond. **Subalpine Warblers** were on Fair Isle on 3rd July and at Toab in late September. There was a scattering of **Barred Warblers** in August and September, with 7 in Shetland, 1-4 daily on Fair Isle from 14th-30th August, the adult was retrapped on North Ronaldsay in August and 7 juveniles also occurred there. One was seen on South Ronaldsay, 1 on South Uist and 1 at Rattray. A **Greenish Warbler** was on Out Skerries in August and an **Arctic Warbler** on Fair Isle in September. There was a reasonable passage of **Yellow-browed Warblers** in September, with a minimum of 15 in Shetland, a maximum of 14 on Fair Isle on 27th September, 5 on North Ronaldsay on 23rd-27th September and singles at Birsay, on the Isle of May and 2 at St. Abbs.



Paddyfield Warbler

The only **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was on South Ronaldsay in late August and the only **Red-backed Shrikes** were at Sumburgh and St. Abbs. An adult **Woodchat Shrike** summered at Carsphairn and a juvenile was trapped on Ailsa Craig on 25th September. Early or summering **Brambling** were on Unst and at St. Abbs in August and an early **Twite** at Aberlady on 28th August. A fine male **Two-barred Crossbill** was on Fair Isle on 1st September, whilst 2 **Common Crossbills** were there, with 30 in Lewis, 1 on Barra and 50 at Strathbeg in July. **Scarlet Rosefinches** in ones and twos totalled 7 in Shetland and reached a maximum of 7 on Fair Isle on 24th September, whilst 4 were on North Ronaldsay and 1 at Wick. Small numbers of **Lapland Buntings** were seen on Out Skerries and Fair Isle in September. The only **Ortolan Bunting** was on Fair Isle in September, where there was also a **Little Bunting**, whilst North Ronaldsay had 2 more. A **Yellow-breasted Bunting** was at Virkie on 21st September and 5 or 6 were on Fair Isle in September. A male **Black-headed Bunting** was on Fair Isle in July and the only American passerine of the autumn was a **Bobolink** on Fair Isle at the end of September.

Pete Ellis

## The Seabird scene

### Problems in Shetland

On Foula, Shetland, seabird numbers and breeding have been monitored for 15 years, and several species have been doing badly for a few years now. Since most of these species breed far into the arctic, and experience much harsher weather than the worst springs and summers in Shetland, it seems unlikely that poor weather is directly to blame.

Arctic Terns on Foula declined from a peak of 4000-6000 pairs in the late 1970s to 200 pairs in 1984-86, and in the last three years they fledged no chicks. Arctic Skua numbers have fallen from 250-280 pairs in 1976-80 to 224 pairs in 1982 and 185 pairs in 1986. Arctic Skua breeding success has also been very poor in the last three years, but this cannot be the cause of the decline in numbers since Arctic Skuas normally start to breed when about three years old, so recent poor breeding will only affect recruitment over the next few years. Nor can Bonxies be blamed; their numbers have also fallen, from a peak of 2950 pairs in the late 1970s to about 2500 pairs in 1986, and as a result their conflict with Arctic Skuas has all but ceased.

Kittiwakes are also down, having decreased by about 40% in number of occupied nests in two monitored colonies between 1979 and 1986. Breeding success has also fallen, from about 1.2 chicks per nest up to 1980 to 0.8 chicks per nest in 1984 and 1986. Again, reduced breeding success has not caused the decline in numbers but has coincided with it. It does not bode well for the future. By contrast, Guillemots and Shags seem still to be breeding well although Guillemot numbers have fallen in some areas.

In 1986, for the first time ever, we found a number of starved downy Puffin chicks at their burrow entrances, and the few adult Puffins carrying sandeels had either tiny or enormous ones, but few of the normal 10-14 cm fish. The poor spring weather in 1986 may



Puffin. Mike Ashley

have affected fish behaviour in some way so as to reduce their availability to seabirds, and it is interesting to note that the species that seem to have suffered the greatest setbacks on Foula in recent years tend to be ones that feed mainly on Sandeels at the sea surface. Deep diving species such as Shags and Guillemots appear to have been less affected, and Gannets are doing splendidly.

Our monitoring of seabird diets and activity budgets also supports the idea that sandeels have become less available to seabirds in recent years. In 1986 Bonxies and Arctic Skuas often left their chicks unattended, but in the 1970s this was most exceptional. The adults increase the time spent foraging, but risk losing their chick to neighbouring skuas. In the last three years both Bonxie and Fulmar chicks have fed much less on sandeels than in the past, being fed more discards and offal respectively. Bonxies prefer to feed on sandeels when these are available and only turn to discards when sandeels are in short supply.

But can bad weather explain the dietary changes and consistently poor success over the last three years or more? Increased industrial fishing for sandeels might result in competition with seabirds such that seabirds would suffer from a shortage of food. When industrial fishing began around Shetland in the early 1970s virtually all our seabirds were increasing, but now there has been a marked reversal of this trend in Shetland for several species. Sprat stocks and sandeel stocks in parts of the North Sea have declined recently, perhaps due to industrial fishing, but it could also be due to natural fluctuations.

Around Shetland sandeel fishing has reached a perilous position. DAFS have determined that sandeel recruitment was lower in 1985 than in any year since the industrial fishery started in that area, and was also exceptionally low in 1983, '84 and '86. Sandeel landings in Shetland have declined to only one quarter of those when the fishery peaked in 1982. Much of the catch consists of juvenile sandeels, and DAFS have suggested that sandeel fishing should be banned after June each year to try to reduce fishing pressure on these young fish. Catching fish before they are old enough to reproduce is a classic cause of the destruction of fish stocks, and Shetland sandeels are now in serious need of conservation. Whether the

By Bob Furness, Mike Harris, John Hunt,  
Nick Riddiford, Sarah Wanless

problems that seabirds, fishermen and sandeels are now facing in Shetland can be blamed on the recent unrestricted growth of industrial fishing is a matter of dispute, and, since we lack detailed knowledge of sandeel biology, it is probably a sterile dispute.

### On Fair Isle

Fair Isle's seabirds had a mixed year in 1986. Some species had below average breeding success; others did quite well but were later than usual in fledging their chicks. Of the most numerous species Guillemots had a successful season, though some chicks did not leave the ledges till the middle of August, while Fulmars were no better than average. Kittiwakes did a little better than in recent seasons, with fewer young seen starving after fledging, though very few broods of three were recorded.

Terns showed an interesting contrast; both species were late but Common Terns enjoyed much higher fledging success than Arctic, although the number of pairs of Arctic trying to breed went up from 8 in 1985 to 81 in 1986. Arctic Skuas were also up (115 pairs compared to 81 in 1985) but many were unsuccessful. Bonxies did rather better, though with 81 pairs (72 in 1985), the population is tiny compared to the Foula situation; interestingly the non breeding flock peaked at only 54 compared to 189 in 1985.

Tystie numbers on Fair Isle (367 adults) seem fairly stable though few chicks were found in census sites. Gulls had mixed fortunes with Common and Greater Black-backed doing quite well but Herring and Lesser Black-backed doing badly. Several other ground nesting species did poorly with few Oystercatcher, Curlew or Lapwing chicks reared. One species that continues to prosper is the Gannet; 258 nests were counted (130 in 1985) and large numbers of prospecting birds were seen ashore in summer.

### On the Isle of May

The 1986 season started so very slowly that we wondered whether the halcyon days were over, and whether we would at last be able to document a bad breeding season.

The first Guillemot egg was laid on 20 April, a few days later than usual. However, instead of laying gathering momentum during the next week only a few more eggs were laid. Breeding did not really get underway until the end of the first week of May but then the majority of females laid which suggested that conditions had improved quickly. Very few Puffins were seen ashore in April even though laying often occurs in mid-April, and Shags were still standing around rather aimlessly when they normally would have been incubating. Only when we came to ring the chicks did we discover what had happened to the Puffin's breeding. Over 50% of the eggs had hatched by 4 June which was later than the usual 28 May-3 June but not as late as 1974 (11 June) or 1979 (5 June). The first Shag egg was not found until 4 May. In only four other years since 1962 has laying been so late. Some birds were still laying in July and the first young did not fledge until early August. In contrast terns and Fulmars laid at the normal time and the first Kittiwake eggs on 9 May were a week earlier than in 1985.

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- 3 newsletters a year with details of current projects, plus national and international reports. (See *BTO News* No. 143 pp 8-10 for details of the Seabird Colony Register and other work being carried out by Seabird Group members.)

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Despite our first impressions of a shortage of Puffins, the counts of occupied burrows in sample areas showed that the remorseless increase continued (Figure 2). Kittiwake numbers were down slightly (4800 nests from 5510 in 1985). Guillemots remained about the same, Arctic Terns increased but Common Terns decreased. The very peculiar season for the Shags made it difficult to interpret counts; just possibly they were down somewhat but we still found 1310 nests on a single count in June.

All species had a successful season with many pairs of Kittiwakes and Shags rearing two young. About 80% of both Guillemot and Puffin pairs fledged young which was about as good as these species can manage anywhere. Many juvenile terns were seen on the wing. It was, all-in-all, a good season despite the slow start. Our initial pessimism was misplaced and the populations remained healthy.

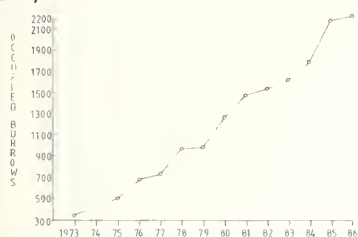


Figure 1: Isle of May Puffin Population

#### And on Inchmickery

Roseate Terns increased from 9 pairs in 1985 to 18 pairs this year, providing one really bright spot in the rather mixed seabird season of 1986.

## Update on Scotland's seabirds

Results from the second of three summers of fieldwork for the Seabird Colony Register have been arriving all through the autumn. The surveys have covered almost the whole east coast of Scotland where seabirds were counted in all but four of the 10km squares between Duncansby Head and the Firth of Tay. A superlative effort in Shetland during June produced coverage of nearly 1600km of coastline. In fact some participants in those surveys are still claiming not to have recovered from the pace set by the organiser, Martin Heubeck! In the west, all of the coast from Cape Wrath to Skye, apart from one 10km square, and about a quarter of the coast further south was also surveyed for seabirds, much of it for the first time since Operation Seafarer in 1969-70. The main areas still to be visited next summer are in the west and southwest of the mainland, the Western Isles and parts of Orkney.

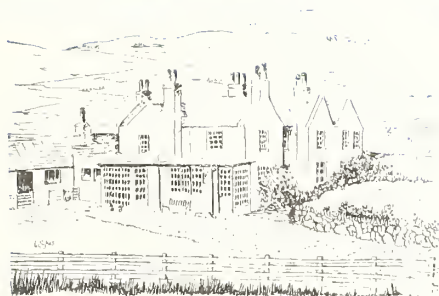
Completed recording forms received so far show that Scotland's seabirds are generally in a very healthy state — with the perhaps surprising exception of the Herring Gull. Herring Gull numbers have halved since 1969 on the east coast, and have declined at many sites in the west of Scotland too. The other large gull species, Great and Lesser Black-backed, have shown little overall change in numbers on the east coast during the last 16 years. But in the west, Great Black-backed Gulls have decreased by about a fifth of their 1969 numbers. Auk populations, in contrast, have thrived nearly everywhere.

The Seabird Colony Register is already being used as a source of information on past records for Scottish seabird colonies, and this summer's surveys have provided plenty of valuable up to date counts. If you have any seabird counts for this year or the past which can be used in the Register, please send them to me without further delay. The aim is to complete coverage of the entire coastline next summer, and the Seabird Group (see page ??) will once again be offering grants towards the costs of expeditions, boat hire and so on. Some of the target areas for 1987 are already known so contact me if you are interested in counting seabirds next April or June. Thanks to the help of many participants in this summer's surveys, the Seabird Colony Register is well on its way to providing thorough documentation of Scotland's seabird colonies.

Clare Lloyd

## Monitoring of seabird productivity

The Nature Conservancy Council and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology have initiated a scheme to collect biological data on cliff-nesting seabirds throughout Britain. Both organisations are keen to involve amateurs (and there is even some money to help with expenses). If you are interested in helping and can either check a Kittiwake, Shag or Fulmar colony visually several times between mid May and late July, or could ring and weigh chicks, please contact: —M P Harris, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Hill of Brathens, Banchory, Kincardineshire AB3 4BY.



## Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay — Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist — almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc.

There are no day-trippers, no caravanners, etc., but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hôte cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating and private facilities). Drive on-off car and passenger ferry ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Dinner, accommodation and breakfast from £25.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles.

There are also three luxury self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £55.00 weekly. Also special demi-pension arrangements for Field Study parties from £775 daily. Details on request.

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# Conflict on the high tops

The mountain plateau is one of Britain's most natural and fragile habitats. Among the finest examples are the high plateaux of the Central Cairngorms, Glas Maol to Lochnagar, and Drumochter. Never before have these important mountain tops been under such threat. Ski development poses the greatest danger, though additional pressures arise from other recreational uses and overgrazing. The evolution of these problems is complicated and solutions seem far away, especially when viewed against a backdrop of weak local economies and rural depopulation. Yet high mountain plateaux and corries attract huge interest in both summer and winter. Popular pursuits include wildlife studies; hill walking, rock climbing and skiing; and more basic pleasures, such as wilderness experiences and the satisfaction derived from physical exertion and appreciation of scenic beauty. The one common ingredient is human perception which, of course, varies with the individual. Some see too much pressure whilst others press for further development.

Skiing started to take off in Scotland soon after the war, and in the early 1960s chairlifts and roads were built at Cairngorm and Cairnwell. For the first time skiers and walkers gained ready access to the hills throughout the year. With further developments at Glencoe and the Lecht, the new sport flourished during the 1970s, creating much-needed jobs and satisfying a growing passion for the piste. Although the tows, snow fences and service facilities appeared at odds with the spectacular, open Highland landscape, and the lifts providing access for day trippers resulted in some local damage to the delicate soils and vegetation, there was apparently little serious conflict with wildlife.

In 1980 this was set to change when the Cairngorm Chairlift Company proposed to develop the undisturbed corries close to the Cairngorms NNR. Perturbed by the implications, various conservation bodies joined forces to oppose the Lurcher's Gully scheme, and the ensuing 1981 Public Inquiry vindicated the conservationists' case, resulting in the Secretary of State refusing planning permission. Since then, however, successive developments have been approved by the local authorities, despite some strong objections. Three locations have existing consent: Ben Wyvis in Ross-shire; Aonach Mor near Fort William; and Drumochter, just south of Dalwhinnie, where two developments have been approved on a mountain area probably exemplifying more of the variation of Britain's montane vegetation than any other site. At Glenshee a ski-tow and snow fencing now spread 500m into the Caenlochan NNR, putting some extremely rare plants at risk. And, ironically, in August this year the Secretary of State told Highland Regional Council that he would not interfere with proposals to construct snow fencing in Coire an t-Sneachda, southwest of the current Cairngorm development. Many see this as the beginnings of a truly deleterious intrusion upon the unique near-arctic wilderness.

Research by Adam Watson has shown that 17% of soil-eroded and plant damaged areas on and near the Cairn-

gorm ski-development lie within the NNR. The disturbed soils have less water, fine particles and organic matter, and support less bilberry, least willow, ground lichens and mosses. The grass or sedge dominated communities fare better, especially on shallow slopes where erosion is less severe. Neil Bayfield and his colleagues have specifically examined damage to the reindeer moss-lichens which form a beautiful yellowish-grey carpet. Damage is more extensive in open parts, is most pronounced within 5m of paths, and is more insidious during dry weather. Recovery takes about 8 years, but some other plant communities may take decades, if not centuries, to recover.



*Cairngorm footpath. D. Gowans (NCC)*

People tend to associate damage with winter only, when skis cut up vegetation where snow cover is incomplete, or kill vegetation and induce soil erosion where snow gets compacted. And with 7,000 skiers daily on Cairngorm and Glen Shee on a good weekend, and up to 10,000 on Cairnwell, this problem is obviously immense. But greater access to the tops afforded by new roads and the use of chairlifts in spring and summer is also responsible for intrusions, and there can be no doubt that restriction of sporting use to winter would alleviate much of the pressure.

For the birds so dependent on the mosaic of plant communities for food, nesting and shelter, summer damage and disturbance may have serious



consequences — and there may be 1,000 people on the Cairn Gorm-Ben Macdui plateau on a good summer's day. Surveys of nesting Ptarmigan, Grouse, Meadow Pipit and Wheatear on Cairn Gorm and Cairnwell reveal that, although densities are no lower on disturbed ground than in undisturbed areas, breeding success of Ptarmigan and Grouse is extremely low for both, being almost zero on Cairn Gorm. Adam Watson suggests that breeding failure is due to severe egg predation by crows attracted to the high ground by food scraps left by tourists.

Conservationists do not object to all skiing applications, eg Aonach Mor and within the existing ski corries of Cairn Gorm. But we have to accept that it is wholly inevitable that conservationist and skiing interests will clash. There are two primary reasons for this. First, the broad whale-backed summit ridges of the high mountains, coveted for their snow holding qualities, also contain internationally outstanding dwarf shrub, moss and lichen heaths, the special habitat of rare hill birds, particularly Dotterel. Second, whereas continental resorts have skiing mainly within the ecologically more resilient tree-zone, in Scotland the required area is above the natural tree-line, where the impact is more drastic. With infertile soils and a severe climate erosion follows damage to the vegetation, and the ensuing conditions encourage flash floods and gullyng, which render the hillside unstable. Litter on the hillsides and plateaux attracts scavenging foxes, gulls and crows, which then prey on eggs and chicks, of several



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Soil is one of the important factors affecting mountain flora and fauna. In the Cairngorms the prevailing granite gives rise to coarse porous soils, liable to much movement and erosion, and holding a relatively low abundance and diversity of invertebrates, because of their low organic matter, instability and paucity of important elements. On the Moine Schists further west, for example in Drumochter, the soils are more fertile and silty, affording a more stable and better quality nesting and feeding habitat. The base-rich status of the soils is also reflected in the diversity and abundance of the associated plants, with pockets of reliable, long-lasting snowbeds holding rare plant communities which are better developed in the Cairngorms than anywhere else in Britain.

With mounting concern over the development of the high tops, the Nature Conservancy Council has embarked on a 5-year research project on mountain plateau ecology, designed to evaluate the actual and potential impacts of ski developments, other recreational activities, and sheep and deer grazing — on the soils, vegetation and fauna. The NCC has already spent 6 years surveying the vegetation of all upland Sites of Special Scientific Interest, to identify

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The NCC's new study project should identify the topographic and physiographic features, and the vegetation types, most prone to damage, and then determine the ecological associations between the different soils, plants, invertebrates, birds and mammals. Study plots will be sited in areas subjected to varying degrees of trampling and disturbance, in regions where developments are as yet only proposed as well as in those where they have already occurred. In addition to establishing a baseline for monitoring change, we shall try to evaluate the ecological role of birds, especially Ptarmigan and Dotterel. We may find that some of the more productive hills produce a surplus that can boost breeding numbers on the more barren, granite massifs. If so, then clearly

*Golden Plover. E. C. Fellows*

*Dotterel. Iain MacLeod*



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In the meantime, there is an urgent need for revised national planning guidelines for skiing, to supersede the ambiguous and weak terms of the present ones. These should surely form part of a strategy hammered out by planning authorities, developers, downhill skiers and conservationists. Over the past 5 years there has been a 13% rise in skiing, and in places such as Newtonmore it is said that unemployment without the skiing industry would be nearer 50% than the present 20%. We have to accept the need for a viable skiing industry, and a thriving summer tourist industry, but we must also safeguard our more precious sites by restricting access via roads and chairlifts to the winter only. If we fail the currently futile conflict will escalate, and we will lose the very features that attract tourists, climbers and skiers, as well as one of our most cherished and internationally important wildlife habitats.

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## Judean Jubilee

A cloud of White Pelicans against a bright blue sky, a flock of 1000 Levant Sparrowhawks on migration, Baillon's Crakes feeding avidly on myriads of insects and Caspian Terns plunging for fish in a tranquil sea. Just some of the sights enjoyed by SOC members on the Jubilee trip to Israel in April 1986.

211 species were recorded on the trip in habitats ranging from snow-capped Mount Hermon to the Judean and Negev deserts. Animals included magnificent Nubian Ibexes, small Syrian Rock Hyraxes (whose nearest relative is, almost unbelievably, the Elephant) and two species of gazelle. Insects were not overlooked either and the sight of two members pursuing dragonflies in the scorching midday sun must have left locals thinking they were English rather than Scots.

The difference in the avifauna was immediately obvious to members as they awoke on the first morning to the fruity calls of Yellow-vented Bulbuls and the incessant song of Graceful Warblers. Any thoughts of dreaming were dispelled on stepping outside to observe the iridescent plumage of male Orange-tufted Sunbirds as they hovered in their search for nectar. An extensive area of fish ponds on the Mediterranean coast produced masses of waterbirds, including various herons, White-breasted and Pied Kingfishers and noisy Spur-winged Plovers. At the end of the first day at least one member was reeling from the impact of 40 new species.

Next day saw us birding on the rocky slopes of Mount Hermon where we had fine views of the endemic Tristram's Serin and other localised species like Rock Nuthatch. In the north visits were also made to a superb gorge with nesting Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Long-legged Buzzard and Bonelli's Eagle, and to the Hula reserve which protects the remains of the once extensive papyrus swamp.

The verdant north was left behind as we reached the spectacular wilderness of the Judean desert above the shores of the Dead Sea. Here we were privileged to watch a Bonelli's Eagle tenderly feeding pieces of a Sand Partridge to its young in the nest, and a Hume's Tawny Owl dining on a bat. The mountain-top fortress of Massada combined history with close-up views of unfamiliar species like Hooded Wheatear, Scrub Warbler and Tristram's Grackle.



Photo: Jim Stewart

Moving south, we could have been in Africa as we passed through the savanna of the Arava valley en route to the migration hot spot of Eilat at the northern end of the Red Sea. This feeling was heightened by the fauna, with gazelles by the roadside, brilliantly coloured Little Green Bee-eaters perched on the acacias and one of the few remaining Lappet-faced Vultures soaring amongst a flock of migrating raptors.

Very hot weather meant that migration was poor by Eilat standards but the combination of sea, salt pans, fields, palm groves and mountains produced a wide range of species. Highlights included Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse drinking at a traditional pool at dusk, Oriental Skylark, a pair of elegant Namaqua Doves, confiding crakes, breeding Dead Sea Sparrows and hundreds of Red-throated Pipits. The underwater observatory was fascinating with the coral, anemones and fish providing a wealth of colour.

In the northern Negev, large tracts of the fragile desert vegetation had been destroyed by military activity. Finding the specialities here was not easy but perseverance produced three species of sandgrouse, Cream-coloured Courser, Desert Wheatear, Houbara Bustard and the pale desert race of Eagle Owl.

Finally, we took in the sights of Jerusalem but even here it was impossible to get away from the birds with a Short-toed Eagle drifting over the Garden of Gethsemane.

Alan Brown

## ORNITHOLIDAYS 1987

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## Subaqua Sandpiper

On June 21st 1986 I observed an adult Common Sandpiper bathing 15 yards from the George Waterston hide at Vane Farm. Visibility was good. Much of the bathing, which lasted for about five minutes, was standard procedure, but on three or four occasions the bird ran out from the stony spit on which it was standing for about a yard, totally submerged beneath the shallow water. It then returned to its original stone, at no time breaking the surface. The action was reminiscent of a foraging Dipper, but the Sandpiper was not seen to feed under water. The bird appeared to be unconscious of the observer and walked away when it had finished its ablutions.

Cramp's handbook records the Common Sandpiper as diving "when disturbed" but wading and swimming "rarely".

Betty Rowling

## Expansion of roof nesting by Common Gulls in Aberdeen

In 1984 a pair of Common Gulls successfully raised two young on an office block roof at Altens, Aberdeen (SB 13:229). During a local survey in 1986 to determine the density of breeding Oystercatchers using urban and suburban sites within Aberdeen a further five roof nesting sites of Common Gulls were found. These contained a minimum of twenty pairs of birds and were all within Altens Industrial Estate, to the south of the city.

The presence of the Common Gulls on various roof types was noted from early April onwards. Nest building and copulation were seen on 12th May and there were chicks at three sites on 12th June. These dates closely reflect the first reported instances in 1984. Colony sizes were: 1 nest (2 sites), 2 nests (1 site), c 4 nests (1 site) and c 15 nests (1 site). The presence of adult Common Gulls on other roof sites would indicate a further expansion by this species in Aberdeen in future years.

Of particular interest is the interrelationship between Oystercatchers and Common Gulls at these roof sites. At all the sites containing Common Gulls, Oystercatchers nested in close proximity and usually on the same buildings. There appeared to be no direct competition for nest sites, with the Oystercatchers nesting on flat areas of roof covered by loose granite chippings and the gulls choosing to nest on elevated roof ridges and atop air ventilation ducting on a higher level. The Common Gulls built a simple nest of vegetable matter while the Oystercatchers used the loose granite chips to build their nest cups. In one instance a pair of Common Gulls built their nest within five metres of an Oystercatcher nest, both pairs successfully raising two chicks. Fledgling success in general would tend to indicate that this site-sharing arrangement could have benefits to both species particularly with regard to the pressures from predatory gulls and crows.

Brian Stewart



Snipe. Arthur Gilpin

## Displaying Snipe

Our house overlooks a large lawn of about half an acre which slopes to a river and the wide marshy meadows of Balquhider Glen beyond. In spring this area supports a variety of breeding waders. On the evening of May 22nd we noticed a pair of Common Snipe immediately outside the window. They were totally absorbed in what appeared to be a courtship ritual, running very closely side by side with the (presumed) female slightly in front. If the female stopped the male at once ran round as though to get behind it but was immediately thwarted by the female turning to face him as he did so; they would then continue running together until the next pause when the circling action would be repeated. Only once the hen crouched briefly as though to accept the male's advances but as soon as he approached from behind she ran off as before.

After a time the birds appeared to become more excited and as the female turned to face the male both birds would flutter a foot or two into the air facing one another with wings extended above their backs then drop down to continue running side by side. This performance continued for at least twenty minutes during which the birds crossed and re-crossed the lawn with periodic confrontations when they fluttered up against one another. Eventually they ran out of sight and we found them again about ten minutes later still continuing the ritual on a side lawn. The whole performance therefore must have lasted for at least forty minutes and continued into near darkness. For most of the time the birds were silent but occasionally the "chip-er" call was made as they ran.

*The Birds of the Western Palearctic* (Vol. 3) gives only a brief and sketchy account of this behaviour.

Margaret Mylne

## Sparrowhawk attacking Teal on the water

D. Kenney's note describing a Buzzard taking a Teal prompts me to record the following incident.

On 4 May 1984 in Lossie Forest, Moray, I noticed a lone female Teal swimming on the surface of a small loch surrounded by pine trees. A male Sparrowhawk swept out of the trees and dived onto the Teal. The two birds grappled on the water for several seconds before the Sparrowhawk broke free and flew off, dripping water. The Teal left soon afterwards, apparently uninjured.

Although Teal have been recorded as among the prey of Sparrowhawks, the facts that the duck was on the water and that a male Sparrowhawk was involved seem remarkable.

Martin Cook

## More atypical crow nests

In SB 13:188 I reported a case of ground nesting by Carrion Crows at a site near Newmachar, Aberdeenshire in 1984. During 1985 Carrion Crows nested on the ground in a nearby field but cattle were introduced to the field and the breeding attempt was unsuccessful.

About 700m away two Carrion Crow nests (c70m apart) were found at the bottom of gorse bushes which were growing through a 1m high drystone dyke. Both were eventually lined but no eggs were found. There was a suitable 16ha strip of mature woodland c300m away from the dyke. A check of this after leaf fall in autumn revealed five distinct crow nests of the year. If all were used during 1985 this would have been in excess of the high breeding density found near Newmachar in 1982 (SB 13:188). There appeared to be no persecution of crows in this area, presumably territory restrictions are forcing these birds to nest in unusual places. I thank Mr R. Ingram for bringing the nests to my notice.

## And in 1986 . . .

The ground site was unoccupied this year but two nests were located at the dyke. One was on the dyke and contained four eggs on the 12 May. The second was c150m away and situated on top of a 1.5m gorse bush which was growing through the dyke. No eggs were found at this nest. Unfortunately the former was accidentally destroyed when all the gorse was ripped out during fencing maintenance. The former checked for a nest but it was very well hidden and not noticed until too late.

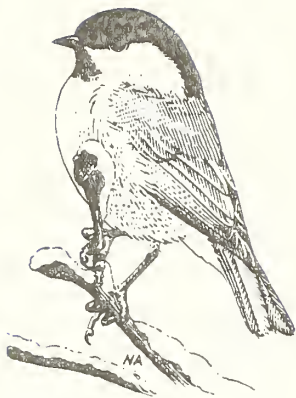
The strip of wood mentioned above held four active Carrion Crow nests during April and a single tree c250m away in the opposite direction from the dyke also held an occupied Carrion Crow nest; this is similar to the density levels found in 1982.

G. W. Rebecca

## Crow attacking ducklings

On 28th June, 1986, at Clunie Loch, Perthshire, I saw an immature Carrion Crow attempt to catch Mallard ducklings by dropping on them from a height of approx 4 metres from a Willow overhanging the water's edge. The ducklings scattered to safety, leaving the crow to swim about 3 metres back to shore using the corvine equivalent of the "butterfly stroke"!

Alan Hilton



## THE ATLAS OF WINTERING BIRDS IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Compiled by  
PETER LACK

This companion volume to *The Atlas of Breeding Birds* is derived from the surveys, organised by the BTO and IWC, of birds present in the winters of 1981/82, 1982/83 and 1983/84. There are full-page two-colour maps for the 192 main species, each faced by a page of text commenting on the survey results, the species generally and the distribution as mapped. In addition there are introductory chapters by Dr Lack on the maps, the weather in the three winters, bird patterns and movements; appendices describe the planning, organisation, field methods, and the processing of data from record cards to computer output and maps. A team of 23 artists, led by Robert Gillmor, has provided the line drawings which head the species accounts.

448 pages, £19.00 net

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## Reviews

**Shorebirds: an Identification Guide to the Waders of the World**, by Peter Hayman, John Marchant and Tony Prater; Croom Helm; 1986; 412pp; 88 plates; 214 distribution maps; £19.95.

This excellent book comes in two halves; first 88 plates containing 1,800 colour paintings of the world's 214 species of wader, and then corresponding species texts.

In the plates, which are drawn to scale, Peter Hayman has painted outstanding pictures, which illustrate the identification features without exaggerating them, and happily the publishers have used the quality of paper and colour-reproduction which the illustrations deserve. On the facing page there is a comprehensive legend together with clear distribution maps. It would have been nice to have everything scaled up by a factor of two, to alleviate the over-crowding on the plates, but that would not have been possible without taking the book into a very different price-range.

John Marchant and Tony Prater have complemented the plates with well researched up-to-date material. The identification features, habits, movements, plumages and measurements of each species are given, together with recent and significant references. The list of acknowledgements indicates the thoroughness of the research and there is certainly a huge volume of information, even if it is somewhat cramped by the format. This is the definitive statement of what is known so far and it will surely prove to be an exceptionally popular book. One more nice touch — there is a respectful black border around the maps of the five species which are probably extinct!

Graham Appleton

**Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland** by J. Gooders and A. Harris. Kingfisher Books; 1986; 288pp; 255 species illustrated in colour, with maps; £5.95.

**Field notebook of British Birds** by R. Lovegrove and P. Snow. Collins; 1986; 128pp; 280 species illustrated in colour; attached notebook and checklist; £7.95.

Not so long ago it was easy to recommend a field guide to an aspiring ornithologist. The classic **A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe** by Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom reigned supreme. Born in the fifties, it set the standard for the next two decades, encouraging a whole generation of bird-watchers to aim for new heights of field identification skill.

Times have changed. Several excellent new guides have appeared in recent years, each with its own particular twist to solving the identification puzzle. My dog-eared 'Peterson', complete with annotations in juvenile scrawl, still has a well-earned place on the bookshelf, but seldom wins the doubtful honour of being stuffed in the pocket of my field jacket. That lot usually falls to the Mitchell Beazley **Birdwatcher's Pocket Guide** by Peter Hayman, with the **Shell Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland** as a back-up in the van's glove compartment. But two new contenders are now vying for these spaces.

The first, the Kingfisher **Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland** by John Gooders, illustrated by Alan Harris, is a triumph of good design and neatly summarized information. Each of 255 species of bird regularly seen here has a page devoted to it. The illustrations are

large enough to show even quite subtle plumage features and give good examples of male, female, juvenile and winter plumages where appropriate. The text is concise and is supplemented by a distribution map, a scale showing the month-by-month likelihood of encountering the bird, and a tinted box which brings together information on behaviour, field characters and breeding biology. The data in these boxes on clutch sizes, incubation and fledging periods will be appreciated by many people — I'm already using the guide as the quickest reference I know to glean just that sort of information. Colour flashes at the page corners flag different groups, such as waders or warblers, but since the species are arranged in the usual systematic order, this feature is largely one to help beginners. At £5.95, this book is very good value indeed.

The second recently published guide is the **Collins Field Notebook of British Birds** by Roger Lovegrove, illustrated by Philip Snow. This takes the novel tack of showing birds in the way the artist feels they might be seen in the field. As a result, each of the illustrated pages fairly jumps with activity. No room for stukkies specimens here; flying, feeding, stretching and courting are the order of the day. Most two-page spreads cover a group of related species, such as thrushes or scrub warblers, in text and pictures. These are supplemented by some mainly pictorial spreads which contain very brief descriptions of the species which are portrayed.

The artwork has a sketchy, pastel quality, well-suited to conveying the jizz of a bird, while the text contains many useful hints to help field identification. Overall, the information presented is less exhaustive than that in the Kingfisher guide, the illustrations not so all-embracing as those in the *Shell* guide. Despite these shortcomings, the book's pocketable size and flexible pvc cover, (complete with attached notebook and official BTO checklist), make it well-suited to a life in the field, rather than a cosseted life on the library shelf. So Peter Hayman may soon have company in the dank recesses of my Barbour jacket. As for the Kingfisher guide — who puts gloves in a glove compartment anyway these days?

Kenneth Taylor

**The Birds of Colonsay and Oransay** by D. C. Jardine, J. Clarke & P. M. Clarke; published by the authors; 1986; 59pp; 16 photographs in colour of island habitats and birds, and a map; £3.50.

I have just returned from a first visit to Colonsay, and found this book both interesting and useful. The islands, despite their modest size, have very varied habitats. They are well described, from sea cliffs and inland cliffs (where a pair of Golden Eagles have bred for the past 25 years) to lochs, moorlands, machair, and the mudflats separating Colonsay from Oransay, which are good for migrant waders. The best areas for birds are described, most of them easily accessible from the 14 miles of island roads.

The main part of the book is a species list. Early published records are given. These make interesting reading, and are compared with recent status. Pride of place must be given to the Choughs, which have bred on Colonsay since 1973, and are rare birds in Scotland.

The authors' use of the spelling Oransay (rather than the more usual Oransay) is preferred by the islanders.

W. G. Harper

**The Birds of the Borders**, by Ray Murray, 127pp., SOC Borders Branch, 1986, £3.50; **The Birds of Fife**, by Anne-Marie Smout, 274pp., John Donald Ltd., 1986, £7.50; **The Birds of the Lothians**, by Ian J. Andrews, 124pp., SOC Edinburgh Branch, 1986, £3.50.

These books have a great deal in common: each summarizes the status of the birds of a Scottish Region (though the Fife book uses the old boundaries and excludes the Isle of May) and all have received financial support from the SOC. Each could be fairly described as indispensable, since there is nothing else in print that does the same job. How well each author has tackled that job is the subject of this review.

Anne-Marie Smout has gone for a commercially printed softback which looks much smarter than the others, which have been privately published; paradoxically the dearer book may be easier to distribute to the book trade. Personally, I found the print of **Birds of the Lothians** perfectly adequate; **Birds of the Borders**, unfortunately, is less easy on the eye. All three have many drawings and diagrams but no photographs. The Fife book has BTO Atlas maps (winter as well as breeding), but it is debatable whether the expense of reproducing data readily available elsewhere is justified, especially as the winter maps suggest that many coastal waders occur inland. The Lothian and Borders books both use histograms and tables to summarize data on many species and in general have a more concise text, whereas Mrs Smout is much more discursive, with an eye to the general reader.

These sort of guides always find it easiest to document rarities, and the best measure of their success is how well they handle the really common birds. Here **Birds of the Lothians** scores, partly because so many fieldworkers have been active in and around Edinburgh, but also because Ian Andrews has consulted so widely before switching on his word processor. Even so I felt all three books would have benefited from a pre publication check by someone experienced in censusing common birds.

Obvious errors seem few: there are better Puffin counts for some Forth islands and most Berwickshire Guillemot counts were of birds not sites while CBC fieldworkers will be surprised to read that Sedge Warblers, Linnets and Reed Buntings, among others, have shown no changes in status in Fife in recent years.

I do not think it is a coincidence that these regions all produce local bird reports, whose editors and contributors can take considerable credit for publishing much of the information which the three authors have utilized. Time will tell how Mrs Smout's more commercial approach appeals compared to the utilitarian Andrews/Murray versions, and this information should help prospective authors in other parts of Scotland. I am glad the SOC helped all three, but regret that it was less generous when local reports were starting up. I hope that in all three regions local bird-watchers will buy these books and then undertake the obvious follow up project, which is the quantitative Breeding Atlas scheduled to start in 1988.

Stan da Prato

**The Sparrowhawk** by Ian Newton; T. & A. D. Poyser, 1986; 396pp; many black and white photographs, drawings and maps; £16.

This book, the culmination of 14 years' research stemming from the author's lifelong fascination with the Sparrowhawk, draws together material which has been published in no less than 27 scientific papers in a variety of journals. These are now eloquently linked to form a most readable account.

**The Sparrowhawk** is of particular interest to readers in Scotland since most of the fieldwork was undertaken in the South of this country. The Scottish study forms the backbone of the presentation, but, where appropriate, comparisons are made with other areas in Britain or overseas, or with other Accipiters elsewhere.

The early chapters set the scene with descriptions of the bird and its habitat, food and hunting behaviour; the breeding cycle is then covered in considerable detail, from pre-laying behaviour to the post-fledged period; and later chapters deal with the effects on breeding success of seasonal trends, age of breeding birds and mate fidelity. Each chapter ends with a useful summary of its salient points, and the book with detailed conclusions in which the author shows how "every aspect of the ecology and behaviour of each sex has been moulded by evolution, in order to maximise individual breeding success."

The book is written in an easy style, with all technicalities explained carefully and all scientific argument followed through and supported by 63 tables. These are grouped at the end of the book for easy cross-reference, although this can sometimes be a little distracting when first reading a particular section. The statistics used are generally appropriate and given in sufficient detail, attached to the tables, where the reader who is not statistically minded can ignore them if he so wishes. The 90 figures are located in the text where they are relevant. **The Sparrowhawk** is further embellished with an apposite drawing at the end of each chapter by Keith Brockie, who has captured the birds in many poses with charm and authenticity. There are also 50 black and white plates chosen for their relevance to illustrate the text. One even gives us a view of the author in his natural habitat, half-way up a larch tree! The production, by Poyser, is up to this publisher's usual very high standard.

In concluding that most aspects of the Sparrowhawk's performance are limited ultimately by its food supply, Ian Newton has provided a wealth of evidence in support of the theories of his late mentor at Oxford, David Lack. He has been able to go much further into understanding the behavioural mechanisms which facilitate this regulation than previous authors, and this book will be required reading for future generations of population ecologists. The detailed treatment of a single species here nicely complements the author's earlier more wide-ranging review, **Population Ecology of Raptors**. The fluent style and the presentation make **The Sparrowhawk** highly recommendable for anyone seriously interested in birds.

Dorian Moss



## The Sparrowhawk

by IAN NEWTON

Dr Newton's monograph of this widely distributed raptor is based on 14 years' research and fieldwork in SW Scotland. During the period he attempted to trap and ring all Sparrowhawks in the study area and to find their nests. As a result many individual birds were known throughout their lives.

The book draws on Dr Newton's wide knowledge of the species, and that of other workers in Britain and abroad, and benefits additionally from his particular interest in population regulation and breeding performance of the Sparrowhawk and the remarkable contrast in size between males and females.

Thirty-eight drawings by Keith Brockie complement the text and there are over 80 diagrams and 50 photographs.

396 pages plus 24 plates,  
£16.00 net

## Birds in Scotland

by VALERIE M. THOM

390 pages, 26.5 x 19 cm, £24.00 net

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## Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 January for the March number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries — and suggestions — will be welcomed by the Editor (Tel. 0738-23508). Information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in SB 14(1).

## SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

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Further details from Membership Secretary, Miss Pat Webster, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

## Endowment Fund Grants

The closing date for applications for 1987 grants (and for reports for grants received in 1986) is 31st December 1986. Application forms are obtainable from John Davies, the Club Secretary.

## SOC Notices

### Subscriptions 1986/87

Those members who have not yet renewed their subscriptions will find another subscription renewal slip with this copy of *SBN*. Please renew your subscription NOW by completing the slip and sending it to Pat Webster, the Membership Secretary. Subscription reminders are costly.

### Scottish Bird Report 1985

The 1985 *SBR*, edited by Angus Hogg, was published in November as part of *Scottish Birds* 14:2 and sent to all Club members.

### Scottish Bird Report 1986

Observers are reminded that all records for 1986 should be sent to the local recorders (listed in the 1985 *SBR*) by the end of January 1987. This will enable the recorders, compilers and editor of the *SBR* to publish the 1986 *SBR* in the autumn of 1987. The editor invites submission of black and white photographs or colour slides of rare or uncommon birds taken in Scotland during 1986. Remember the *SBR* is your report, so please give it your full support by being prompt with the submission of your records.

### New Honorary Presidents

At its 50th Annual General Meeting the Club elected two new Honorary Presidents, Mr A. Donald Watson and Miss Valerie M. Thom, in recognition of their services to Scottish ornithology. Donald Watson, a founder member of the SOC and President 1969-72, is a professional bird artist whose work is widely known and much appreciated, especially through the many bird books enhanced by his illustrations. He is also an author, his monograph on *The Hen Harrier* probably being his best-known work. Valerie Thom, a keen amateur ornithologist, was President 1978-81, and became editor of *Scottish Birds* in 1982. In 1981, after a career in agricultural and conservation education advisory work, she left the Countryside Commission for Scotland to become a free-lance author and consultant. Her *Birds in Scotland*, published for the Club on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee, represents a significant addition to the literature on Scottish ornithology.

### 1986 Photo Competition winners

This year's winning entries, which were all colour transparencies, will be reproduced in the March 1987 issue of *SBN*.

- First: D. Hassell . . . Hooded Crow.  
Second: W. E. Middleton . . . Great Tit.  
Third: D. J. Garner . . . Grey Wagtail.

## Breeding Black-throats

The Black-throated Diver is a rare and threatened breeding species in Britain, currently confined to Scotland. As part of ongoing studies the RSPB is attempting to document any changes that have occurred in the numbers of breeding pairs over the last 50 or more years. We would be pleased to hear from anyone who has records of birds on lochs during the breeding season at any time in the past. We need to know the loch name (with grid reference); the year and date; numbers of adults seen; any evidence for breeding. Negative records are also useful, particularly if these relate to lochs where you have known birds to be present in the past. Coastal sightings of Black-throated Divers in winter would also be welcomed. If you have previously sent in information please just update this for recent years. All information will be treated in confidence and should be sent to **Dr. Greg Mudge or Roy Dennis, RSPB Highland Office, Munloch, Ross-shire, IV8 8ND.**

## Neck-banded Geese

Several hundred Scandinavian-breeding Greylags (and also some Bean Geese) have recently been marked with coloured and numbered neck-bands. Anyone who sees geese with blue (Greylags) or orange (Bean) neck-bands is asked to note the one letter and two number code and send details of the sighting to **Dr Leif Nilsson, Ecology Building, S- 223 62 Lund, Sweden.**

## Small ads

### SCOTTISH HIGHLAND WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS.

Week long birdwatching courses in comfort in small friendly guest house. Expert tuition, individual attention, safaris, lectures. Beginners welcome. SAE: Ron Youngman, 'Atholl Bank', Pitlochry, Perthshire (0796-2753).

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**JUBILEE POSTER** celebrating 50 years of Scottish ornithology. A 4-colour art poster (24" x 16") featuring superb colour photograph of Golden Eagle by Don Smith. £1.95 (inc. p&p) from SOC (Poster), 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

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**THE BIRDS OF THE LOTHIAN** by Ian Andrews. 125 page p/back. Summaries of status and distribution, many maps, graphs and sketches. £3.50 inc p&p from I. Andrews, 15 The Parsonage, Musselburgh, Midlothian.

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THE SCOTTISH  
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

# Scottish Bird News

MARCH 1987  
ISSN 0268-3199

No.5

Edited by Stanley da Prato  
Assisted by Valerie Thom

## The killing continues

In Scotland today the numbers of all raptor species (except Merlin) are increasing. That this is so is in no small measure due to the efforts of a legion of interested parties from bird watchers to scientists, landowners to legislators. The fall and rise in the fortunes of the Peregrine, for instance, owes much to scientists discovering the root cause of the malaise affecting the birds but also to those hardy souls who mounted round-the-clock guards on nest sites still at risk from robbery in the lean years of the 60's and 70's. What is not generally realised is that many raptors are still the victims of illegal killing in the Scottish countryside.

The Species Protection Department of the RSPB is in the unique position of being the main recipient of the bad news about raptors in the UK; in Scotland this takes the form of telephone calls and letters (often anonymous for fear of retribution!) to 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh. During 1986 approximately 50 reports of illegal actions aimed at our birds of prey were received. As many reports came from walkers who have stumbled (sometimes literally!) on a trap or poison bait when taking an unfamiliar route, these reports represent only a small proportion of the killing which is taking place; the perpetrators do not operate in areas where they are likely to be discovered by the general public.

Victims in recent years have included Golden Eagles (at least 15 reports since 1981, one in 1986), Buzzards (over 17 in 1986, the most common victim), Peregrines and Sparrowhawks. Occasional rarities such as Gyr Falcon, Marsh Harrier, Rough-Legged Buzzard and even Sea Eagle have all fallen victim to poison baits in the last decade. One of the most persuasive arguments against the use of poison in the countryside is that it is totally indiscriminate in its effect. However, what is most disturbing at the present time is the apparent increase in deliberate attempts to destroy raptors using poison, traps, guns and destruction of eggs and young. There are many landowners, estate factors and gamekeepers who actively care for raptors on their ground and much of the recent success of our birds of prey is due to their efforts. Unfortunately some of their colleagues have a different view and in some areas of Scotland birds such as Hen harriers and Buzzards are locally extinct because of persecution.



*Sparrowhawk in a Poletrap*  
Iain MacLeod

At present Pheasant rearing appears to be on the increase with thousands of birds being reared in pens in small woods and shelter belts, later to be released for game shooting by members of shooting syndicates. 'Vermine control' is often in the hands of inexperienced part-time amateurs who resort to the use of pole traps and poisoned bait. In that situation the intended victim is as likely to be a Sparrowhawk or Tawny Owl as a Crow or Jay. If there has been damage to young Pheasants there is seldom any investigation, just summary execution of the first bird to land on a trap. An

alarming trend is the deliberate destruction of adults, eggs and young of Peregrines in areas such as S.E. Scotland, where the birds have only recently returned after the pesticide era.

The excuse given for such actions, by those who admit to them, is that 'there are now too many birds of prey; we put up with them when they were rare'. This attitude is both arrogant and illegal. Most arguments about the damage done by raptors do not stand close inspection - the fact is that raptors are killed as part of a continuing tradition of prejudice against 'hooked beaks'.

The shooting press have expressed considerable concern at the growth of the anti-blood sports lobby. The RSPB and SOC do not oppose legitimate field sports and recognise that habitat benefits can result from managing land for sport. However, the widespread killing of raptors in Scotland, from the island of Islay to the hills of south Scotland and the glens of the north-east, gravely weakens the arguments of those who defend shooting. The shooting fraternity must put their house in order if they are to retain their present sport.

In 1986 some of our most beautiful national assets have ended their lives flapping from a trap or sprawled beside a poisoned bait. How can we criticise the slaughter of birds in Italy or Cyprus when these shameful practices continue in our own back yard?

*This article was written by the RSPB's Species Protection Dept. who should be contacted immediately by anyone who finds evidence of persecution of raptors or other protected species (17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, Tel: 031-556 5642).*

## Editorial

*Scottish Bird News* enters its second year with a new editor but the same philosophy as it started with. This is an appropriate point at which to thank Valerie for all the work she has done in getting the new publications going; in fact she will continue to edit *Scottish Birds* and has kindly agreed to help the new editor of *SBN* get material ready for the printer until he has mastered the technicalities involved.

*SBN* 5 is further proof that the SOC is in a healthy state - our biggest problem is still what to leave out and most of the articles you are reading have had to be edited fairly ruthlessly. Please keep the material coming in but don't be too disappointed if we have to prune or delay your particular piece - it happens to us all! You can also help the Editor considerably by typing double spaced and not underlining headings (as this means put in italics to a printer). Remember that we are always interested in vignettes and photographs, but for good reproduction we need drawings in pen rather than pencil and black and white, glossy prints rather than colour material.

The most important thing remains the actual content, whether the more light hearted goings on at Branches, or the serious conservation issues that affect wild birds in Scotland in the 80's. Conservation is now popular enough to feature in the mass media, with inevitable simplification and exaggeration. One of the main purposes of *Scottish Bird News* is to raise the quality of the debate as far as wild birds in Scotland are concerned; we hope our readers agree and think we have made a reasonable start.

SdP

## Thoughts from a grouse moor

Red Grouse are declining in many parts of Scotland for reasons which include disease, poor weather, grazing of their habitats by sheep and human disturbance. However there are several areas where the birds are very much on the increase.

The Misty Law, Muirshiel, and Ladyland moors on the Renfrewshire-Ayrshire boundary provide an example of how grouse can be brought back on to the hills in increasing numbers after a long period of decline.

This programme functions under the aegis of an enterprise known as the Reconciliation Project - the Joint Management of Grouse and Grazing Animals. Its supporters aim to restore grouse moors and they regard the birds as a money-earning crop, to be produced and marketed in the same fashion as trees or cereals. If successful, the backers can look forward to sizeable cash incomes. At the moment one brace of grouse is worth £25 which means that if a 24000-acres estate or hill farm can be encouraged to yield one brace per 10 acres the net worth of these 240 brace at that price will bring in £6000 and boost the capital value of the estate or farm by £100,000.

Until the Second World War the neighbourhood was regarded as one of the best grouse moors in the Scottish Lowlands. The 'bags' in the years between the World Wars were massive - the owners' diaries reveal that totals of 2608, 1473 and 1507 grouse were shot in 1932-1934. But after the war the estate broke up and without game-keepers the grouse population steadily

declined until very few birds were left. The birds are now on the increase, with broods of up to 12 young in July and August and an average production of five young per hen. In addition, Black Grouse, which were almost non-existent, are coming back. The moor is not yet being shot as the objective is to continue to let the stocks build up.

Three factors underly the recovery. Firstly, there must be a plentiful supply of food with the proper blend of young and old heather to provide cover. Secondly, heather-burning must be done correctly with fires neither too large or too infrequent otherwise there is too much cover and not enough young heather for food. Thirdly, there must be strict control of certain predators, particularly foxes which are Public Enemy Number One as far as game preservers are concerned. This programme amounts to virtual extermination. In the project area between May 1985 and April 1986 a total of 135 foxes were killed following the appointment of a full-time keeper. In addition, 100 crows were killed during a two-month period in Spring 1985. The control of 'vermin' is one of the most controversial aspects of rural life today but is legal.

A further problem is that many keepers still view protected birds of prey as undesirables whose meals mean a loss of some £12 for each grouse plus potential income lost from sportsmen likely to take their custom and their money elsewhere if the moors are known to be short of grouse. The keeper's dilemma is obvious; his job is at stake and if he cannot produce an acceptable number of birds his future is unlikely to be secure. On the other hand, he knows that all predatory birds are protected and that anyone caught breaking these laws is liable to be fined and possibly made redundant. It is still not uncommon to find that raptors such as Buzzards are locally common on some estates where they are free from persecution but non-existent on neighbouring ones where persecution is the norm.

It might be worth considering some form of compensation scheme for game-preservers whose birds are killed by raptors. Such a scheme could be open to abuse and is likely to arouse considerable opposition in some quarters, though government aid already encourages people to plant trees, grow cereals, drain wetlands and, recently, not to disturb important wildlife sites. It would certainly go a long way towards reducing the number of birds of prey which are illegally killed on Scottish moors. It could even lead to keepers not burning large tracts of heather as part of their moorland management duties, if they knew that Hen Harriers or Merlins were likely to breed there during the summer.

Derek Parker

Derek Parker was a Summer Ranger in Muirshiel Country Park in 1985 to 1986.

## Kindrogan FIELD CENTRE PROGRAMME 1987



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# Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record, nor will they be indexed. Please send reports to **Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland**, via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period October to December is covered here.

Late autumn was conspicuously lacking in easterly winds and consequently also lacking in common migrants. There was one arrival around 5th October, when thrushes and finches came into many eastern areas. A few rare birds turned up during the period in several places, but Fair Isle dominated the country with a remarkable series of records.

A **Red-throated Diver** was on the Clyde above Erskine and a **Black-throated Diver** off Langbank. **White-billed Divers** returned to Whalsay and Blue Mull Sound in December. There were 65 **Little Grebes** on the Clyde near Lanark and 51 **Great Crested Grebes** on the Clyde estuary in December. A **Red-necked Grebe** was in Strathclyde Park in October and 3 **Salvonian Grebes** in Broadbay, Lewis, another on the Don and 5 off Ardmere Point. Several blue **Fulmars** were seen in the northern isles and 1 off Peterhead. Few **Sooty Shearwaters** were reported, the maxima being 70 in 5 hours off Fair Isle in October, when 50 passed near Eyemouth; a late bird was seen off Turnberry on 30th. A **Storm Petrel** was at Coulport on 16th November, a **Leach's Petrel** was on the River Teviot at Crailing on 12th October and 8 were off Turnberry on 25th October. A **Bittern** at Duddingston in November stayed for several days, and a **Cattle Egret** at Stranraer in October moved to Croketford in December. A **Glossy Ibis** visited Strathberg in October when another was in Orkney, the latter staying into December.

Two **Mute Swans** were on Spiggie in October and 5 **Bewick's Swans** at Libberton in December. The **Spiggie Whooper Swans** peaked at 384 in October and 152 were at Inchinnan in November. Twelve **Bean Geese** were at Libberton and the Endrick Mouth **Greenland White-fronted Goose** flock reached 193 in October. A **Snow Goose** was seen at Cruden Bay and up to 4 were in East Lothian, with another at Carmichael. Small numbers of **Barnacle Geese** were seen in several areas including 27 over Girdleness on 4th October and 5 at Carmichael in December. A small influx of pale-bellied **Brent Geese** continued with 2 on Fair Isle, 16 at Peterhead, 4 on the



Glossy Ibis  
Sam Alexander

Don, 2 at Carmichael and a single dark-bellied bird was seen in South Uist. An immature male **American Wigeon** on Fair Isle stayed into October, and another was seen in Nigg Bay, whilst an adult male was seen at Culbin. The female **Red-crested Pochard** returned to the Loch of Harray in Orkney for the third year, where the **Scaup** flock reached 120. Male **Surf Scoters** were seen off Unst and in Spey Bay, with 3 in the Sound of Taransay, Harris, along with 700 **Common** and 2 **Velvet Scoters**. A **Smew** was in Orkney and 2 red-heads and a male were in East Lothian and single red-heads at Possil Loch, Johnston Loch and another male at Kelvin Mouth. A pair of **Ruddy Ducks** were on the Barr Loch.

Fair Isle had a sub-adult **White-tailed Eagle** in November and a **Buzzard** was on mainland Orkney and a **Rough-legged Buzzard** in the Lammermuirs in December. A **Merlin** found injured in Lewis in October had been ringed in Iceland and there was an influx of this species into Shetland in October and November. A first year **Saker** or **Saker x Lanner** hybrid was on Fair Isle in November and a **Corncrake** and a **Dotterel** were there in October.

Four **Little Stints** were in South Uist, with 2 in Shetland, 2 on Fair Isle and a **Curlew Sandpiper** in South Uist in October. A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was at Hillend Reservoir in October. Small numbers of **Jack Snipe** occurred in several areas, maxima being 6 at Curlingmire and 13 at Paisley Moss. A **Great Snipe** was on North Ronaldsay in October and Fair Isle had 20 **Woodcock** on 15th November. A **Black-tailed Godwit** was at Inverugie and a **Spotted Redshank** on Harris. A **Greenshank** was on the Ythan on 29th November and 19 were at Woodhall on 16th November. A **Green Sandpiper** was wintering at Erskine and 2 more were at Coulter.

**Pomarine Skuas** were not as common as in 1985, although about 20 were seen in Shetland in October, 1 was at Girdleness, 5 at Hound Point on 10th October and 31 there on 1st November, with 1 at Troon in December. A late **Arctic Skua** was at Rattray on 13th December and Fair Isle had a juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** in October, and a late **Bonxie** was at Troon on 6th December. A **Peregrine** had the bad manners to take a second winter **Mediterranean Gull** in Ayrshire and an adult **Laughing Gull** was seen at Stevenston in November. A late **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at Girdleness on 3rd December. **Iceland Gulls** were scarce in most areas, maxima being 5 on Unst and only 2 in the Western Isles. The adult **Kumlien's Gull** has again returned to Banff.

**Turtle Doves** were in Shetland, with 2 in South Uist and another at Barassie in October. There was an influx of **Long-eared Owls** in the northern isles, with a maximum of 7 at Strand, 6 on Fair Isle and groups of up to 7 in Orkney, including one wearing a Swedish ring. A **Hoopoe** was seen at Tynninghame on 4th October.

Up to 4 **Short-toed Larks** were on Fair Isle in October and 4 **Shore Larks** at Tynninghame, with another at Musselburgh in December. Six late **Swallows** were over Bearsden on 29th October. Fair Isle had a remarkable run of pipits, with **Richard's**, **Olive-backed** and **Pechora**. The first of a small irruption of **Waxwings** arrived in Edinburgh on 27th December, closely followed by others in Shetland, on Fair Isle in Orkney and at Penicuik, with a maximum of 20 at Contin. A **Bluethroat** was on Fetlar and 3 more on Fair



Waxwing  
David Gowans

Isle. Single **Black Redstarts** appeared on Skerries, Fair Isle and at Rattray and Cramond and a **Stonechat** was seen on Fair Isle. A good sized fall of thrushes around 5th October included 5 **Ring Ousels** on Skerries, 4 on Whalsay, 40 on Fair Isle and 50 on North Ronaldsay, along with lots of **Redwings**. Counts of the latter included 3000 in Skerries, 2300 on Fair Isle and 1000 on North Ronaldsay. **Fieldfares** were scarce, although Orkney had a small arrival on 24th December.

Fair Isle had a **Lanceolated Warbler** and the **Paddyfield Warbler** remained into October. Single **Barred Warblers** occurred on Skerries and at St. Abbs. Wintering **Blackcaps** included 4 at Aberlady in December. **Yellow-browed Warblers** in October and early November included at least 13 in Shetland, 13 in Orkney, 2 in the Western Isles, 7 in Aberdeenshire, 2 at Barns Ness and 3 at St. Abbs. A **Dusky Warbler** on Fair Isle on 14th November was followed by another at Kergord the following day. A **Bonelli's Warbler** in Orkney stayed into mid November and a late **Wood Warbler** was at Voe on 16th October. **Chiffchaffs** were scarce, although a few of one of the eastern races were in Orkney, and 2 were at Midross on 13th December.

Along with the influx of thrushes came good numbers of **Bramblings**, including 90 on Skerries, 150 on Fetlar, 600 on Fair Isle and 150 at Holm in Orkney. Three **Goldfinches** on Fair Isle were followed by another in Lerwick. Small numbers of **Mealy Redpolls** were in the northern isles and a few were also seen at Drums. A "Pallescense" **Redpoll** on Fair Isle was followed by an **Arctic Redpoll** on South Uist. Fair Isle also had a **Parrot Crossbill** and a **Scaret Rosefinch**, with another on Whalsay. Four northern **Bullfinches** were on Fair Isle and a **Hawfinch** at Kergord. A maximum of 3 **Lapland Buntings** were at Hermaness and 9 were seen at Cruden Bay, when 15 were at Aberlady and 31 at Eyemouth. Good numbers of **Snow Buntings** occurred in several areas; Fair Isle had 420 on 11th November, in Orkney there were flocks of over 400, and the largest flock in Aberdeenshire was 350 at Balmedie. Fair Isle had a **Rustic Bunting** and 3 **Little Buntings**, with another one on Whalsay. Fair Isle also had a **Yellow-breasted Bunting** and the **Bobolink** stayed there into October.

## STOP PRESS

**Harlequin Duck, Surf Scoter, King Eider** and 3 **White-billed Divers** in Shetland in January. Not a bad start to 1987.

Pete Ellis

# Raptor Results 1986

This report summarises the activities of four of the five Raptor Study Groups now active in Scotland. (Highland RSG results may be documented separately.) This year we have also included Peregrine data for Orkney and Shetland. Species studied by group members include Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Merlin, Kestrel and Hen Harrier.

A total of 59 occupied Eagle home ranges and 295 occupied Peregrine sites were monitored. The map shows the areas covered by each group:- North East (NE), Central (C), South West (SW) and South East (SE). The SWSRSG includes Bute and Arran.

This is the sixth report from NE and the third from C, SW and SE. The information has been gathered by an army of dedicated raptor workers throughout Scotland, most of whom are voluntary and work solely in their spare time. We present this report on behalf of all contributions.

Thanks are due to the various species coordinators who managed to send data: Jon Hardey, Patrick Stirling-Aird, George Carse, Dick Roxburgh, Sandy Payne, Adam Watson, Roger Broad, Eric Meek and Pete Ellis.



Iain MacLeod

## Peregrine

**North-east Scotland RSG.** Of 103 sites checked, 82 were occupied with 75 pairs found. 57 pairs definitely laid eggs of which 39 clutches hatched. Several sites failed due to bad weather with a number of full clutches deserted in April snow storms. Two sites lost small chicks (one brood deserted due to tree planting). Two nests were possibly robbed and at a further 4 there was evidence of gamekeeper persecution. On the good side, a clutch of 5 was recorded and on the coast 5 pairs laid, with 3 of them fledging 6-7 young. In total 35 successful eyries produced at least 71 flying young. A few unusual incidents were noted:- An adult male died when it flew into the side of a police land-rover. This happened near to a previously undiscovered 'new' site. The male killed was almost certainly breeding here and the site failed shortly afterwards. There was evidence of bigamy at one site and at another, 3 females were in the company of one male at a suitable crag. Prey items this year included Jay, Pied Wagtail, Kittiwake (inland), Great Spotted Woodpecker and Mountain Hare.

**Central Scotland RSG.** Birds were recorded on 24 home ranges (several by single birds only), 7-8 pairs laid and 6 nests successfully fledged c.7 young. At one site which was probably robbed of eggs in 1985 protective measures were taken and they fledged 2 young. At another locality an adult pair was seen in flight with a juvenile where no nest is known.

**South-west Scotland RSG.** A poor year all round with very bad spring and summer weather seriously affecting nesting success. 83 sites were occupied with only 56+ young reared. Some sites again fell victim to nest robbers, taking both eggs and nestlings. 5 young men from the Newcastle area were caught with 3 Peregrine chicks in the boot of their car and were all convicted at Stranraer Sheriff Court in December. They were fined a combined total of £10,000. The three chicks were returned to their nest by RSPB and later fledged successfully.

**South-east Scotland RSG.** A very poor year with several extreme factors causing failures. A total of 27 sites were occupied (24 last year). At least 6 sites were robbed of eggs or young and 8 sites failed due to weather (a couple of clutches being covered by snow). Two new sites were found with very different 'fates' - one successfully fledged 2 young in a lowland eyrie but the second fell victim to the shotgun of a gamekeeper who in order to secure the demise of his targets also set an illegal fenn trap on the nest ledge. At least two other clutches were destroyed by keepers. **Orkney.** A total of 33 sites were checked, 19 were occupied, 7 by single birds. 2 pairs didn't lay and 2 pairs failed during incubation. A total of 13 young were reared from 7 successful sites - similar figures to last year. **Shetland.** Birds were present at eight sites checked. 3 pairs laid and two were successful, each fledging 3 young.



Iain MacLeod

## Golden Eagle

**North-east Scotland RSG.** Birds were present on 35 home ranges (2 traditionally successful ranges were not checked), at least 16 pairs laid eggs - 2 clutches were broken, 4 clutches deserted and one brood died shortly after hatch. Nine pairs were successful, fledging 14+ young. The poor spring weather certainly affected a couple of pairs, with heavy snow storms in March and April. A similar season to last year.

## Peregrine breeding success in 1986

|                                                              | NE     | C      | SW     | SE     | Ork   | Shet |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|------|
| Home ranges/sites with bird(s) present                       | 82     | 76     | 83     | 27     | 19    | 8    |
| Home ranges/sites in which eggs laid (probably laid)         | 57 (2) | 43 (9) | 58 (2) | 20 (1) | 9 (1) | 3    |
| Home ranges/sites in which eggs hatched (probably hatched)   | 39     | 23 (3) | 31 (2) | 7 (1)  | 7     | 2    |
| Home ranges/sites in which chicks fledged (probably fledged) | 35     | 21 (1) | 30     | 6 (1)  | 7     | 2    |
| Total young fledged                                          | 71 +   | 43 +   | 56 +   | 10 +   | 13    | 6    |

## Golden Eagle breeding success in 1986

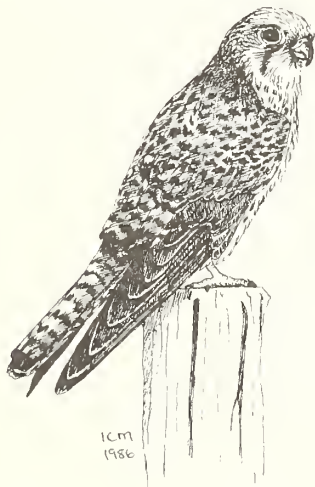
|                                                             | NE     | C     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|
| Home ranges/sites with bird(s) present                      | 35*    | 24 +  |
| Home ranges/sites in which eggs laid (probably laid)        | 16 (4) | 7 (8) |
| Home ranges/sites in which eggs hatched (probably hatched)  | 10     | 6 (1) |
| Home ranges/sites in which eggs failed to hatch             | 6      | 1     |
| Home ranges/sites at which young fledged (probably fledged) | 8 +    | 6 (1) |
| Total young fledged                                         | 14 +   | 7 +   |

\* Two traditionally successful sites not checked.

**Central Scotland RSG.** A poor season with very low spring temperatures in April and gales and rain in early May causing many sites to fail at egg stage. At least 76 sites were occupied, 43+ pairs laid eggs with only 43 young fledged (92 fledged in 1985 and 99+ in 1984). At least one failure was due to egg robbery and two broods were lost due to natural causes. Rabbit remains were found at two eyries.

*Kestrel*

**South-west Scotland RSG.** (Gordon Riddle). Gordon reported the lowest output of young birds since his study began in 1972. One of the wettest and coldest springs and early summers on record produced poor site occupation and very low clutch size of 3.3 (5.2 average clutch size in '84 and '85). 50 territories were visited, 29 (58%) were occupied. (74% in '84 and '85). Of 54 eggs in 18 known full clutches, 27 (50%) hatched (94% in '84 and 69% in '85). Only 25 young were reared from the 50 sites. (137 were reared from 41 occupied sites in 1984 and 78 reared in 34 occupied sites in 1985.) Of the failures, seven of the eight were due to desertion at the egg stage. One female sat on added clutch for 72 days, before they were removed for her own welfare! All in all a pretty awful year.



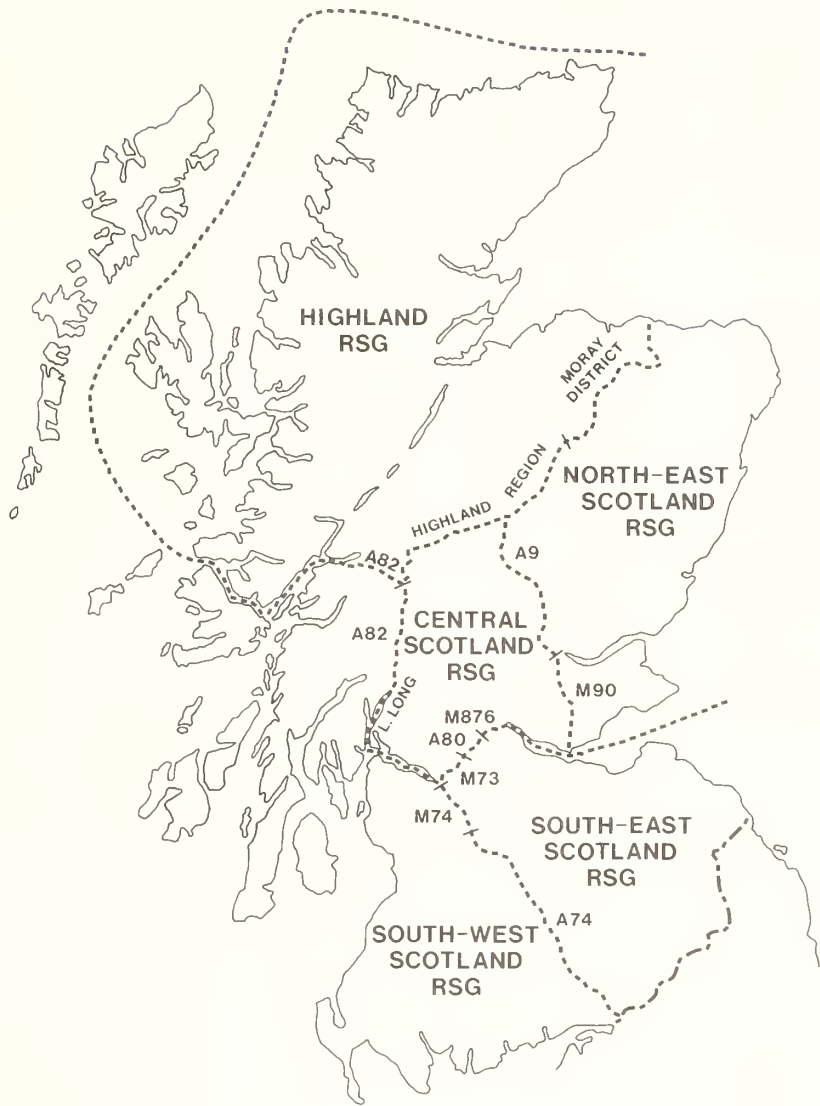
Iain MacLeod

*Hen Harrier*

**South-west Scotland RSG.** In study areas on the mainland, 20+ nests were monitored. Of 15 nests with eggs only 6 were successful, producing 19-22 young. Two females on one moor were shot at the nest (the tail feathers of the dead birds were laid across the empty nests). Illegal persecution of birds of prey is still practised on several of these grouse moors.

On the islands of Bute and Arran 4 nests were found, 2 successfully produced 4+ young.

Iain C. MacLeod & Dave Dick  
R.S.P.B.



Raptor Study Group Areas in Scotland

**Peregrines in Glasgow**

At approx. 14.30 hrs on 4th February 1986, Ian Martin unexpectedly witnessed a male Peregrine courtship-displaying to a female high above a large warehouse just a short distance from Glasgow Cross. With half-closed wings the tiercel dived repeatedly, 'talon-touching' with the female at each upward sweep. Constant background noise of city traffic drowned-out any possible calls. His entreaties were apparently to no effect however, for when a personal visit was made to the warehouse with IM two weeks later there was no sign of the female and only a fleeting glimpse was obtained of the resident male. A single Peregrine was reported hunting over the centre of Glasgow on several occasions during the following few months.

The now disused warehouse in Bell Street was built in 1882-3 for the Glasgow and South Western Railway. A massive six-storey block with its north side overlooking the derelict College Goods Yard, the wide ledges of the windows and high-level hoist doors offer tailor-made artificial nest sites for cliff frequenting birds. Town Pigeons and Kestrels utilise the warehouse regularly, and there is no reason why the building's exposed north face could not attract what would be Glasgow's first breeding pair of urban Peregrines.

John Mitchell

# The Common Birds Census and Waterways Bird Survey in Scotland

In the December issue of *SBN*, Susan and Stan da Prato gave a summary of breeding numbers and breeding success for a range of common Scottish birds in 1986, based on counts and impressions from SOC members around the country. They emphasised that standardised systems for recording are necessary to reduce the subjectivity of such information, and cited the Common Birds Census (CBC) and Waterways Bird Survey (WBS), both operated by the British Trust for Ornithology, as prime examples of such systems. This article expands a little on these two schemes, and explains how they presently operate in Scotland.

## Why count breeding birds?

The population changes of birds are of considerable interest to ornithologists because of both the biological information they give about the species concerned and also their implications for conservation. Rare birds, catered for by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, are monitored by collecting all available records of nesting or attempted nesting, but commoner species need to be monitored by a sampling technique in which standard sections of the population are counted each year. Relatively scarce or restricted species such as raptors or seabirds can best be sampled by specially-directed fieldwork, often by small groups, but the commonest 70 or so breeding species are really only covered by national schemes such as CBC and WBS.

Some might argue that the conservation argument is weak for counting abundant birds such as Chaffinch and Dunnock, but this is far from the case. Indeed, species like these are good indicators of the general state of health of our countryside. Particularly on farmland, widespread factors such as pesticides and fashions in hedgerow management can put millions of birds at risk at short notice.



Kingfisher  
Brian Turner

## The mapping method

Both CBC and WBS use the mapping bird census method, widely regarded as the most accurate, to estimate the numbers of breeding territories on particular patches of land. The CBC covers areas of farmland or of woodland, while the WBS plots are linear along rivers or canals. The end result with either survey is a map showing the numbers and positions of territories detected in or along the census plot. Apart from a few censuses carried out by professionals at the BTO and other institutions, all fieldwork is carried out by volunteer birdwatchers.

Results from mapping censuses are of value in three areas of study. Firstly, the numbers on each plot can be compared with numbers of the same species on the same plots in previous years. This allows the computation of the familiar annual indices of population level for common species, and a more tentative assessment of population trends for some scarcer birds. Numbers can be divided by the area of the plot to give a rough idea of density. Secondly, the numbers can be compared between species, to give an assessment of community composition and structure. Thirdly, the positions of territories on the map can be analysed, in conjunction with the habitat map, to show habitat choice at a very detailed level. Given a series of censuses for the same plot, we can also examine the way in which habitat choice alters with management or natural habitat change.

## The Scottish contribution

Since the scheme started in 1962, there have been 1323 CBC plots in different parts of the UK (not including new plots in 1986). Of these, 185 (14%) have been in Scotland, but more than a third of these have been Ken Williamson's BTO expeditions and similar one-off studies. This figure is evidence that Scotland is under-represented in the national CBC, despite the much valued contributions of many enthusiastic census-workers over the years. For the WBS, there have been 34 Scottish plots, representing about 10% of the national total.

Investigation of the Scottish results from the CBC reveals in general a remarkable consistency of population trends between Scotland and other parts of the UK. This is true not only for long-distance migrants such as the warblers, but also for mainly-resident species like Wren and Song Thrush. One exception is the Lapwing which increased in Scotland and northern England during the 1970s but decreased in the English south and east. Further studies are likely to reveal more regional differences in trends, each of which will add to our understanding of how birds in Britain interact with their environment. Looking at regional trends in community composition, we find for example that, on farmland, Chaffinch and Willow Warbler tend to be relatively more common than in England — and their absolute densities are higher as well.



## More plots please!

We would particularly like to see the numbers of farmland CBCs and Waterways plots in Scotland increased over the next few seasons. This would enable us to monitor the Scottish situation separately, and to compare the results with those from England in greater detail than we have been able to do so far. Because the annual turnover of plots is about 15-20%, roughly 3 new farmland plots are needed in Scotland every year in order to maintain a small increase in the number. Woodland CBCs are already operating at a satisfactory level.

Basic skills in bird identification by sight and sound, and a reasonable degree of physical fitness are the only qualifications needed to census birds for the CBC or WBS. We are looking in particular for observers who can offer at least two consecutive seasons of fieldwork on either an area of ordinary farmland covering at least 60 hectares, or a 3-5 kilometre stretch of river or canal. If you have already started a farmland CBC or a WBS plot, please continue it as long as you can, or train another observer to take over. If you think you might be able to help, please write to me at the **Agricultural Birds Unit, BTO, Beech Grove, Station Road, Tring, Herts HP23 5NR**, and ask for a copy of the relevant instructions.

John Marchant



Logo by Steve Carter

## Sawbill survey

Both the Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser are fish-eating waterfowl, whose occurrence on rivers, lochs and reservoirs had led to concern about their possible impact on commercially important fisheries, particularly salmon and trout. The British Trust for Ornithology are organising a survey of these sawbill ducks throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, in 1987, to provide the first objective survey of their breeding status.

If you are interested in helping with this work, which would involve walking a stretch of river in both April and July counting sawbills and recording brief habitat details, please contact **Steven Carter, National Organiser, BTO, Beech Grove, Station Road, Tring, Herts HP23 5NR**.

## The Lesser Black-backed Gulls of Flanders Moss

After more than a decade as one of Scotland's largest gulleries, the Lesser Black-backed Gull colony at Flanders Moss is in decline. At its peak in the early 1980s it held several thousand pairs. In 1986 there seem to have been a few hundred, with poor breeding success.

Chicks have been ringed at the site every year from the early 1950s, latterly by members of the Clyde Ringing Group. The Lesser Black-back has been much less studied than its close relative the Herring Gull, but its migratory behaviour has attracted interest in recent years. Increasing numbers of adults have been overwintering in England during the last two decades, while immatures have continued to move south to Portugal and Morocco. Analysis of recoveries from the Flanders Moss birds indicates that this more northerly breeding population still migrates south for the winter.

In 1979, a party from Glasgow University and the Clyde Ringing Group ringed 1,000 chicks without difficulty, showing how productive the colony was at its height. In more recent years we have been less ambitious but in 1981-83 four ringers used their quota of 200 rings without effort. In 1985 we found only 63 chicks and in 1986 we found only six.

We have looked through the literature for counts of the colony. Information turns out to be patchy. In 1928, Baxter and Rintoul record the Lesser Black-back as "summer visitor, non-breeding" for this area. By 1935 they were able to quote counts of 50-100 and 50-75 pairs for the West and East portions of the Moss. In "The Birds of Scotland" of 1953 the Lesser Black-back is described as "an abundant breeding species" at Flanders Moss. P.W. Sandeman counted c1 150 pairs in 1950 (SB12:119-120) and the first *Scottish Bird Report* gave 500 in 1968, with a peak count of c.8000 in 1980.

What is the cause of the decline? It is worth noting that, before the days of the Lesser Black-backed Gull colony, the site was known as a Black-headed Gull colony, considered to be the largest in Scotland by Harvie-Brown in 1884. However, it succumbed to persecution by gamekeepers and others taking eggs (W. Evans, *Scottish Naturalist*, May-June 1920). There is no doubt that egg collecting has been rife in recent years. Stray domestic animals have been accused of killing chicks (eviscerated or headless ones are seen there in the breeding season). But human disturbance seems to be the main cause of the decline. Hector Galbraith reports the formation of a new colony a few km. away suggesting that there are still plenty of birds of breeding age (as one would expect from the large numbers hatched in the late 70s and early 80s). I suggest that it should be a matter of concern to ornithologists that a major colony may disappear in a few years, apparently through human activity.

Perhaps the most poignant aspect of the decline has been the appearance of another human activity affecting the gulls. We have recently received from the B.T.O. several recovery forms with the finding details "nature conservation: culled" from Horse Island and Loch Leven. Has "nature conservation" got its priorities right? Does anyone care?

Alastair Whitelaw

## Composite gull/tern colony

In *SBN3*:2 H.E.M. Dott described a composite Black-headed Gull/Common Gull/Common Tern colony in Inverness-shire and commented that he knew of no other instance of these three species breeding in one colony. At West Water Reservoir, in the Pentland Hills by West Linton, all three species have bred together since 1980.

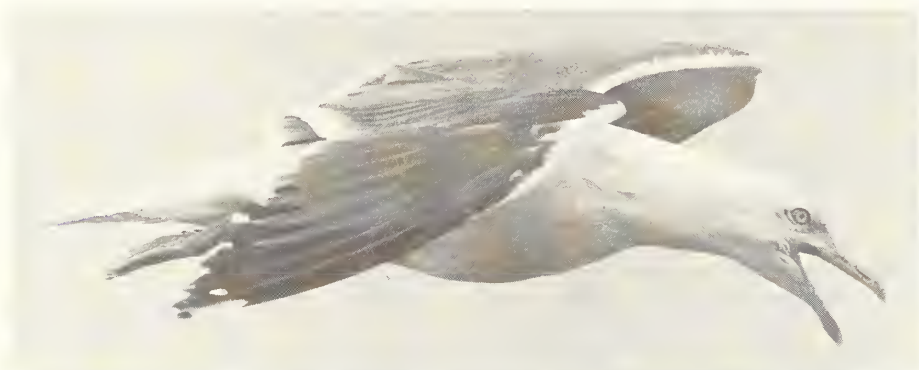
West Water Reservoir is an upland supply reservoir completed and full by 1966/67. For the breeding gulls and terns its most important feature is a permanent grass-covered island which provides a relatively safe nest site. As water level falls two smaller shingle/boulder islands are usually exposed by late May enabling Gulls, which have attempted to nest on the adjoining reservoir banks, to move to the islands, where they are safe from man, foxes and sheep though still liable to suffer from mink. (SB13:3). Rising water levels can also seriously affect the success of nesting birds on the secondary islands.

Black-headed Gulls have bred at this site since 1968 peaking at 1870 pairs in 1982 when most other colonies in the area were in

decline. The population dropped to ca. 800 pairs in 1985 and 1986 as other sites increased. The first Common Gulls bred in 1980 with 7 pairs nesting, representing the first confirmed breeding record for the Borders, and up to 4 pairs have attempted to nest each year since then either on the edge of the main island, or on the smaller exposed islands, which are not so heavily populated by the Black-headed Gulls. Common Terns are only present from May to August nesting as soon as there is a suitable, exposed shore; they prefer the smaller islands away from the main Black-headed Gull colony. First breeding at this site was in 1966 (SB4:4). maximum of 6 pairs has attempted to breed but only 1-2 pairs recently. This may be the only inland site for this species in Lothian and Borders.

As in Inverness-shire, all three species act together in reacting to anyone walking along the shore, or to fishing boats. At the nearby North Esk Reservoir (now drained) all three species have bred, but not apparently together, although in 1983 there were 1425 pairs of Black-headed Gulls on islands, with one pair of Common Gulls on the reservoir bank and one pair of Common Terns carrying food though no nest was found.

Allan W. Brown



Lesser Black-backed Gull Stan da Prato

## The Seabird Colony Register Needs Your Help

This June will mark the end of a 3 year coastal survey for the Seabird Colony Register, organised by the Seabird Group and Nature Conservancy Council. Coverage of the Scottish coastline is nearly complete and, with a little effort, every Scottish seabird colony could be entered in the Register. Help is urgently needed in the following areas:

**Orkney:** Westray (W. cliffs), Eday & holms, Scapa Flow islands, inland Copinsay & holms, Gairsay, parts of mainland.

Contact: **Eric Meek, Smyril, Stenness, Orkney.**

**Shetland:** Small sections of mainland coast, expedition planned to Foula.

Contact: **Martin Heubeck, 3 Lighthouse Buildings, Braewick Road, Lerwick, Shetland.**

**N. Scotland:** North Caithness, especially Dunnet Hd.; north Sutherland including offshore islands, Whiten Hd. and Clo Mor.

Contact: **Greg Mudge, RSPB Highland Office, Munlochy, Ross & Cromarty IV8 8ND.**

Several islands of W. Ross.

Contact: **Jeff Watson, NCC, 9 Culduthel Road, Inverness IV2 4AG.**

Whole of Skye.

Contact: **Andrew Currie, Glaiseilean, Broadford, Skye.**

Mainland from Loch Houron to W. Loch Tarbert, Jura, Islay, Mull, Tiree, Coll & islands in Firths of Lorne & Linnhe (excl. Garvellachs). Contact: **Bob Swann, 28 Druimlon, Drum-nadrochit, Inverness-shire.**

**W. Isles** Most of Lewis & Harris, NW. North Uist, the Monachs, parts of South Uist, most of Barra & adjacent islets. Expeditions planned for St Kilda & the Flannans.

Contact: **Mary Elliott, 16 West Geirinish, South Uist, Western Isles.**

**W. Scotland** Whole coast of Dumfries & Galloway.

Contact: **Ray Hawley, Midtown, Laurieston, nr. Castle Douglas, Dumfries & Galloway DG7 2PP.**

**E. Scotland** Montrose area, coasts of Fife & Lothian, Firth of Forth (gulls & small islands). Contact: **Bruce Lynch, 15 Falkland Crescent, Barnhill, Dundee.**

**BLACK GUILLEMOT SURVEYS** (April & early May): Help is needed for early morning pre-breeding counts in the west of Scotland, especially the mainland north of Skye.

**FURTHER DETAILS:** **Clare Lloyd, NCC, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE.**

# Expedition to North Iceland

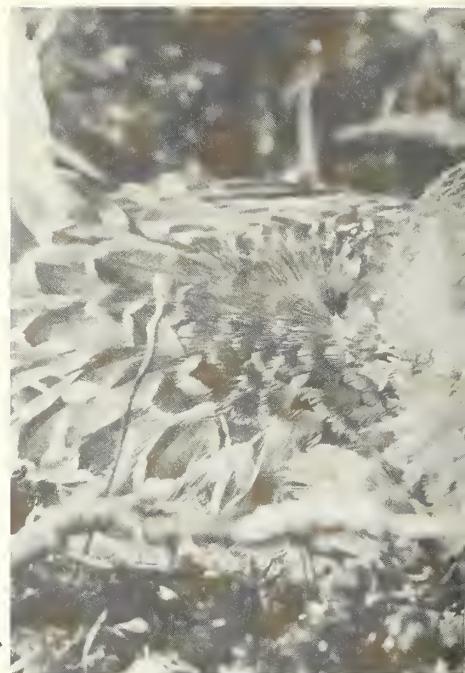
The Twin Otter droned steadily, crabbing slightly in the stiff cross-wind. This was the last of three flights in which we had got into progressively smaller planes. At 1000 feet we could see clearly the shallow lakes with Whooper Swans, extensive bogs and miles of rolling tundra. The Melrakkasletta is one of the few low coastal plains in Iceland and this area had been recommended to us as the best place to find breeding Purple Sandpipers. It was all quite different from our experiences on the Hardangervidda in southern Norway, so we wondered how successful we would be and if we had timed the hatch correctly. It was mid June and certainly would have been too early for the Hardangervidda.

The Tay, Orkney and Grampian Ringing Groups had come to Iceland to find out if the Icelandic Purple Sandpipers form one of the components of the British wintering population. It has been established that there are at least two populations in Britain, characterised by differing bill lengths and therefore termed "short" and "long-billed". The former we have connected with the Norwegian breeding grounds, but the origin of the "long-billed" population was still a mystery. By travelling to Iceland, where "long-billed" Purple Sandpipers breed, we intended to colour-ring breeding adults and chicks, and to look for them on the coasts of Britain.

Colin Corse and myself formed the vanguard and we were joined later by Mike Nicoll and Rick Smith. The plane eventually touched down on the gravel runway at Raufarhöfn where we were met by Phil Whitfield who was carrying out an independent study on waders and with whom we collaborated. He told us that he had found his first Purple Sandpiper chicks the day before - we had

timed our trip perfectly. Adult Purple Sandpipers are easiest to locate and catch when the chicks hatch, and this is also the best time to ring the chicks.

The Purple Sandpiper was perhaps the commonest breeding wader on the Melrakkasletta, though Dunlins were perhaps commoner in wetter areas. They were most abundant in the Arctic tern colonies where we found breeding densities of over 30 pairs per km<sup>2</sup> (c.f. Hardangervidda with 0.64 pairs per km<sup>2</sup>). These tern colonies are quite unlike those we are used to in Britain - the terns nest at a low density across a wide area (over 1km<sup>2</sup>) of tundra and it is quite easy to walk through the colony without spotting a tern's nest. Purple Sandpipers were not the only species to nest in the terneries, and thereby benefit from the protection the terns afforded; Ringed Plovers, Golden Plovers, Dunlins and Eiders also nested. The numbers of Eiders was sufficiently large for farmers to make a living by collecting down from the nests.



*Incubating Purple Sandpiper*

One of the peculiar features of the terrain, and in particular the tern colonies, was the scattering of grassy green mounds, which we termed 'bird volcanoes'. These cone-shaped mounds, 1m tall, were composed of a dense turf of meadow grass, a species which was uncommon elsewhere on the tundra. Several species (Ptarmigan, Snow Bunting and Purple Sandpiper) were seen using these mounds as perches and we assumed that their dropping fertilised the mounds, modifying and enhancing the growth of vegetation so that, over the years, they have come to stand out in the landscape.

The Melrakkasletta is a few kilometres south of the Arctic Circle, though this did not prevent us from seeing the midnight sun, since the refractive properties of the air allowed us to see below the horizon. The continuous daylight tended to disrupt our daily rhythm though did give us the opportunity to work for long periods. Generally, we found it best to trap Purple Sandpipers during the cool hours of the early morning, so we usually slept most of the day or until the sun on the tents made it uncomfortably hot. This resulted in variable periods of sleep from a few hours to a Rip-van-Winkle epic of 22 hours.

It soon became evident after capturing a few adult Purple Sandpipers that, although the bill lengths fitted well with our "long-billed" birds in Britain, the wing lengths did not. Several birds were much longer-winged than anything measured in Britain, suggesting they did not form a part of our wintering population. There was, however, still



*Purple Sandpiper Chick*

*Ron Summers*



Ron Summers

quite a degree of overlap between the Icelandic birds and the "long-billed" British birds so it is possible that some may come to Britain. In all, we colour-marked 300 Purple Sandpipers so there is a good chance that some may be seen in winter.

As well as the marking and measuring programme we carried out observations on the breeding biology of Purple Sandpipers, especially to obtain information on why the female deserts the male and the chicks when they

hatch. One possibility is that the female loses condition during incubation and has to leave the brood in order to ensure her own survival. However, weights of females obtained prior to desertion did not indicate that they were under stress.

Although the work was geared almost entirely to Purple Sandpipers we did not overlook opportunities to collect information on other species. We retrapped a British-ringed Dunlin and Redshank. The latter had been ringed at Tentsmuir by Mike - there must be few instances of a ringer catching the same bird in different countries.

As with any trip the success is only partly gauged by the amount of data collected and new facts discovered. Equally important are the unexpected personal experiences that are etched on the mind, such as waking up to the haunting cries of Great Northern Divers, watching a Grey Phalarope trying to spin in a pool that was too shallow to swim in, or enjoying the lively banter when it was noticed that Rick's wellies had RS initialled on both boots - surely one should have been LS!

The expedition was supported by Sir Herbert Bonar, SOC, BOU, BTO and Shell U.K.

Ron Summers

*If anyone should see a colour-marked Purple Sandpiper please contact R.W. Summers, 353 Arbroath Road, Dundee, sending details as soon as possible.*



Campsite - Melrakkasletta

Ron Summers



## WADERS

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by Desmond and Maimie Nethersole-Thompson

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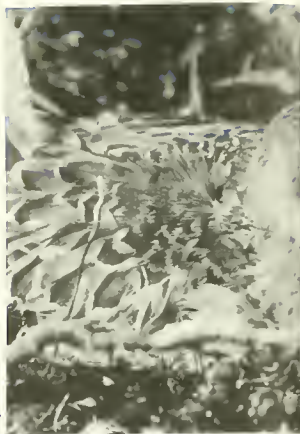
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Purple Sandpiper Chick

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# SOC News

## North Berwick 1986

Anniversary meetings can, too easily, become sentimental affairs, looking back with self-satisfaction to the years safely negotiated rather than concentrating on the lessons to be learnt for the task in hand. Not so the SOC jubilee conference. Certainly there was more than a trace of nostalgia in Morton Boyd's tribute to Fraser Darling, but John Arnott's brief history of the club set us right at the outset: what ornithologist could look back with much pleasure to a time when Crested Tits were widely shot and the newly fledged club could only accept that it was impotent to do anything about it?

Four of the other talks concentrated on how the past 50 years have treated our bird life. In all but that on the gamebirds, for which Peter Hudson painted a bleak picture with the fine details that shooting bags allow, the story was surprisingly cheerful. Despite the loss of wetlands, Malcolm Ogilvie could report more rises than falls amongst the water-fowl: a tribute, perhaps, to their adaptability. One decline could even be laid at the door of pollution control, for it is not yet clear where all the Scaup now deprived of the Edinburgh sewers have gone! For the raptors, Roy Dennis told us of worries about Merlins, but good news of most other species, not just the Sea Eagles and Ospreys that catch the headlines. The changes in seabird numbers that Mike Harris described were remarkable, with dramatic rises in most cases. He made the point that, while wrecks of oiled birds are distressing, at the level of their population birds prove remarkably resilient. The same might be said of the reaction of raptors to pesticides and of swans to lead poisoning. The decline in grouse and partridge may be reversed once the factors responsible have been identified and corrected. But this is no call for complacency: we must know what is going on before we can devise the remedy. Peter Hudson portrayed the hapless gamekeeper as the ornithologist's friend (changed days indeed), striving to keep his moors profitable and so save them from the new evil of blanket afforestation. His lucid explanation of the economies of this last threat made one hope that no members of the audience were in need of a tax dodge!

Three other talks completed the programme. Peter Lack gave an appetite-whetting preview of the long awaited winter atlas. Bryan Nelson made it plain that boobies are an excellent group to study, not just for their behaviour, but because their distribution obliges you to spend long periods in beautiful places. And, last but not least, a high point for many of us was the marvellously evocative account of Desmond and Maimie Nethersole-Thompson of their studies of breeding waders, commenced even before the club began.

An excellent weekend, therefore, and a fitting celebration. The changes in birds, and in bird-watching, over the past half century have been dramatic. Problems have been overcome, but still others loom. What will the next half century bring? There was much discussion of this and of where the SOC should be going in the years ahead, both informally and at the AGM. Should it modernise

its image, move house, expand, change its name, set up a telephone answering machine for rarity hunters, and even (perish the thought!) get shot of its Crested Tit? Lots of ideas were floated and plans discussed: if the next 50 years involve as much change as the last, the club clearly has the vitality to cope.

*P.J.B. Slater*

## Borders Branch Workshop

A very successful workshop took place at Bowhill Estate on 22nd November. Using materials donated by various people (not all knowingly!) a total of 66 nestboxes, both open-fronted and for hole nesters, were cut, assembled and treated.

After liaison with the head forester the boxes were tied to trees at several sites within the estate over the first weekend in January. The boxes will be used for future pullus ringing by Borders SOC ringers and details of breeding success will be recorded for the BTO Nest Record Scheme. It is hoped to repeat this annually and erect boxes at different sites, especially to encourage Pied Flycatcher and Redstart.

Ten branch members participated in the workshop and thanks are due to David Grieve for organising it and to the Duke of Buccleuch and his staff for allowing use of Bowhill Estate and its facilities.

*Malcolm Ross*

## Dumfries Dinner

The Dumfries Branch Jubilee Dinner was held at the Aberdour Hotel on 21 November. The evening began with a taxing semi-serious quiz. Members and friends were organised into teams of three and were required to identify birds, ornithologists, the work of well known bird artists and material derived from a variety of species - the Pennant-winged Nightjar feathers proving too difficult for most. The winners were Mrs Bobby Smith, Stuart Taylor and Derek Skilling who scored 40 out of a possible 50 points. After the buffet dinner Edmund Fellowes read some comic verse by Ogden Nash (My own favourite, which somehow turned up in the quiz, affirms that "The song of Canaries never varies, And when they're moulting they're pretty revolting"). The highlight of the evening for many of us was provided by Bobby Smith, who showed old cine-film of Solway Goose Week-ends. While the cars looked remarkably ancient, the birdwatchers looked a great deal younger than they do at present!

*R. Mearns*

## The Great Fife and Kinross Bird Race

Although Club members in Fife and Kinross did not take part in the SOC Sponsored Bird-watch in May last year, they did support the - by now traditional - Great Fife and Kinross Bird Race which took place the same weekend. The proceeds all went to the Club's Golden Jubilee Appeal, so the result was the same in the end.

The final sum raised was £492.16 after expenses had been deducted: a splendid total and only second to that of the Edinburgh Branch. Congratulations to all those who took part, and warm thanks to all St Andrews Branch members who sponsored the teams.

*Frank Spragge*



## Edinburgh Jubilee Lecture

The December meeting of the Edinburgh Branch moved from its usual venue to the George Square Lecture Theatre, where 350 people heard Dr. Ian Newton describe how long-term studies on the Sparrowhawk have shed light on the birds' population ecology. The audience's enjoyment of the evening was greatly helped by the comfortable seats; the seating in the usual venue in Chambers Street is such that only an anorexic dwarf with a cushion can sit in reasonable comfort. The event was sponsored by Uniroyal, who decorated the walls with a liberal supply of posters extolling their green wellies. However, most branch members and guests seemed more interested in the wine bar, or getting their copies of "The Sparrowhawk" signed by Ian Newton and Keith Brockie. All in all, a most successful evening for the committee, who are reliably reported to be looking for softer seats for the 1987-88 session.

*SdP.*

## Clyde Branch Tetrads Atlas

Every member in the Inner Clyde area can contribute to this project, which is now entering its third fieldwork season. The aim is to map the breeding season distribution, and breeding status, of all species in the Inner Clyde recording area during the period 1985-1989. Instead of the more familiar 10-kilometre square, the tetrad (or 2-kilometre square) is used as the basic mapping unit. A progress report will appear in the April Clyde Branch bulletin, along with instructions for the 1987 season. These can be obtained by sending a s.a.e. to: Alan Wood, 47 Kilbowie Road, South Carbrain, Cumbernauld G67 2PZ.

The Clyde Branch Bulletin is distributed three times a year at the Glasgow meetings. Members who do not attend meetings can obtain copies by sending an A5-sized s.a.e. to the Branch Secretary.

## Fluctuating House Sparrows

The front page article in *SBN4* has prompted David Shepherd, of Invergowrie, to send in details of winter counts of House Sparrows made for the BTO Garden Bird Feeding Survey over the last 13 years. Starting in 1972 numbers were at a peak, generally remained high until the late 70's, and dropped to a low in 1979-80. A rising trend, but with several fluctuations, has been apparent in the 1980's, though numbers have never reached those of the mid 70's. There seems to be some link with winter weather but it is doubtful if that is the whole story; breeding success may also affect the numbers recorded in winter. There is undoubtedly scope for more work on one of our commonest, and most accessible, birds.

# Photographic Competition 1986

First Hooded Crow D. Hassell

Second Great Tit W.E. Middleton

Third Grey Wagtail D.J. Garner



Entries for the 1987 Photographic Competition are now welcome. Please send all entries to SOC (Photo Comp), 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT by 31 August 1987.

## HIGHLAND FIELD STUDIES



Mosses and Liverworts  
Spring Flowers  
Exploring Morvern  
Dandelions  
Exploring Morvern  
Mountain Flowers  
Sedges and Rushes  
Wildflowers of Tayside  
Natural History Photography  
Exploring the Highlands  
Exploring Tayside  
Bryophytes  
Natural History of Skye  
Birds of Morvern  
Autumn in Tayside  
Birds of Autumn

Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Ardtornish, Argyll  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Ardtornish, Argyll  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Abriachan, Inverness-shire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Harlosh, Skye  
Ardtornish, Argyll  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire

April 17-21  
April 25-May 3  
May 23-30  
May 24-29  
May 30-June 6  
June 27-July 4  
July 11-18  
July 18-25  
August 1-8  
August 15-22  
August 22-29  
September 11-18  
Oct 3-10  
Oct 10-17  
Oct 17-24  
Oct 23-25

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BRIAN S BROOKES MBE MSc, Highland Field Studies, Glenshieling, Blairgowrie, Perthshire, PH10 7HZ. Telephone: Blairgowrie (0250) 4605.

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Florida  
Vancouver & the Rockies  
Venezuela  
The Galapagos  
Australia  
New Zealand  
Jordan  
Israel  
Turkey  
Cyprus

N.E. Greece  
Mount Olympus  
Yugoslavia  
Lake Neusiedl  
The Camargue  
The Rousillon  
Andorra  
Spanish Pyrenees  
Majorca  
Iceland  
The Gambia



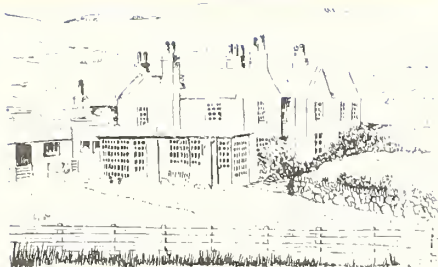
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# Scottish Ringers' Conference 1986

The twelfth Scottish Ringers' Conference was held at the Landmark Centre, Carrbridge, on 23 November 1986. The conference was introduced by Roy Dennis whose concern for our welfare was apparent in his opening remark: "Everyone should check that they have hotel accommodation with Sheena."

Speakers in the morning concentrated on birds of prey. Brian Etheridge spoke about Morayshire Buzzards and concluded that the time of maximum stress was from January to March, which coincided with the highest level of gamekeeper activity. At this time birds were most dependent on carrion and thus most susceptible to poisoning by the unscrupulous use of alpha-chloralose baits. Jeff Watson then spoke about Golden Eagles in Scotland. He showed that breeding density correlated with carrion abundance, whereas breeding success correlated with the availability of live prey. Since the current form of sheep husbandry in the West of Scotland leads to a high level of carrion, changes of land use towards forestry may well have a detrimental effect on Eagles. John Love described the re-introduction of Sea Eagles to Scotland, culminating in the successful rearing of a chick in 1985. Roy Dennis then talked about the use of artificial nests, particularly with Ospreys. Birds can be moved to nesting sites which suffer less from human disturbance.

After lunch Brian Little continued the theme of artificial nests, this time with Merlins in the Kielder Forest. This has not been too successful since the forest edge is now up to 1200 ft which appears to be too exposed for Merlins to breed successfully.

The theme changed to waders and both Fraser Symonds and Bob Swann considered aspects of wader mobility. Fraser looked at waders and industrial development in both the Firth of Forth and the Moray Firth. Changes due to industry may be masked in the most mobile species, such as Knot, but are apparent in more sedentary species, such as Oystercatchers. Bob gave a rather more speculative talk on site quality and usage by different age classes. From analysis of weights it appears that juvenile birds feed in poorer habitats than adults in the Moray Firth.

After tea the theme changed to seabirds and we were introduced to a new term NOGMI, 'Non Oiling Guillemot Mortality Incident', by Greg Mudge while Andy Webb looked at the distribution of Razorbills and Guillemots in the North Sea.

Mike Harris then discussed improved methods of monitoring breeding seabirds by using photographs taken at critical times in the breeding season. This could enable easier monitoring of plots within colonies and would yield much more useful data than simple colony counts.

To the delight of the TRG this ended the days' talks and dinner and the bar followed.

Chris Mead started the proceedings with a very subdued audience on Sunday morning. Andrew Ramsay then described how Siskins actually like Sitka Spruces for breeding. We were then taken further north to Iceland in a talk on Purple Sandpipers by Ron Summers. Iceland birds are bigger than Russian birds and females are larger than males. These measurements indicate that some Russian birds visit Scotland.

After coffee Kevin Woodbridge gave an informative talk about North Ronaldsay Observatory, which hit the news earlier in 1986 due to its problems with Hedgehogs predated breeding gulls and waders. He had some stunning slides of ringing at the lighthouse, with falls of up to 60,000 birds. Ringing was carried out from a converted Austin Taxi and included 800 Redwings in three nights.

The final talk of the conference was delivered by Tim Stowe on Corncrake studies on South Uist, in an attempt to find out why their numbers have decreased. This was a largely nocturnal project, in which birds were fitted with radio transmitters. The greatest threats to the species appear to be changes in agricultural practice, particularly due to sheep. However, some minor changes in harvesting techniques might benefit the chicks' survival chances greatly, in areas not changed over to permanent pasture.

*Martin Moss*

## The largest eagle in the world.....

The Philippine Eagle (called the Monkey-eating Eagle until its name was changed by presidential decree) is one of the two largest eagles in the world. Only on one island, Mindanao, does a reasonable population, perhaps 50 to 100 pairs, exist in the remaining areas of rain forest but, as I discovered at the Philippine Eagle Conservation Centre which I visited in 1985, it is seriously threatened even in its last refuge.

Research has revealed that this eagle will live only in undisturbed rain forest with trees which are large enough to provide nest sites and a plentiful supply of flying squirrels. Though there are reserves, of which Mount Apo National Park is the largest, these receive almost no protection; half of the Mount Apo Park has disappeared in the last few years due to logging and clearing by peasant farmers. Worse still, a stuffed Philippine Eagle on the mantelpiece is seen as a status symbol by some rich Filipinos and there is believed to be an illegal trade in the export of young birds. Though the eagle is not particularly shy it is very vulnerable; the pair which I had hoped to see had abandoned their territory following the killing (by persons unknown) of the young bird in the nest.

The Philippine Eagle's best hope lies with the work being carried out at Baracatan by Ron Krupa, a Canadian ornithologist, and his team. In a country where there is almost no concern for wildlife it was a refreshing change to meet the Filipinos working for the



*Philippine Eagle*  
*Mike Leven*

Eagle Programme for no more than bed and board — and that not very luxurious! Besides studying the eagle's ecology and monitoring the wild population, an extensive captive-breeding programme is underway. Birds for the captive-breeding programme come from two sources: young birds found when nest

trees are felled by logging operations and injured birds, which have usually been shot. It is too early to say how successful the programme will be, but there are promising signs. Eggs have been laid but were infertile as none of the captive males were mature. However, at least one male should be reaching maturity in 1986.

Unfortunately little is being done to conserve the wild birds and their habitat, primarily due to lack of funds and support from the Philippine Government. Whatever his other faults, President Marcos seemed genuinely interested in the future of the Philippine Eagle but the collapse of his Government meant that promised grant aid was not forthcoming. In addition much of the habitat of the eagle is in the hands of the rebel New Peoples' Army. The Baracatan Centre was in a rebel sphere of influence at the time of my visit, which added some spice to birding in the forest, though I was advised that the rebels were always friendly to visiting bird-watchers but were inclined to 'liberate' their binoculars. Needless to say, I didn't meet any.

The Philippines now have a new Government. Given the problems facing the country, it is understandable if wildlife conservation is not a high priority. Perhaps the best chance for the Philippine Eagle lies in its tourist potential — if the Government learns that there are tourists who wish to do more than sample the night life of Manila it may be more forthcoming in its support. A visit to the Philippines can be thoroughly recommended and offers excellent birding, but take a spare pair of binoculars — just in case!

*Mike Leven*



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## Reviews

**The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland**, compiled by Peter Lack; Poyser; 1986; 448 pages; many maps and drawings; £19.

"You've done the fieldwork - now buy the book", probably sums up the Winter Atlas for many birdwatchers. The first printing had to be returned but this edition is well up to Poyser's standards. Even if you didn't take part, a glance through the maps raises many interesting questions about bird distribution in winter. Most species have the standard one map and text in a double page spread though a few, eg. Lapwing and Redwing, get more detailed treatment. I think that some fieldworkers will be disappointed that more use was not made of all the data collected, especially in the intensive, pilot surveys. I should have liked more on the difficulties of censusing outwith the breeding season; referring to a paper in the Proceedings of a Conference in Spain for fuller discussion of the trials is not very convenient for British readers. The references are rather sparse in several sections of the book and give a misleading idea of what has been written on several species in winter. Perhaps the best summing up of the Winter Atlas comes from its own foreword "Now we have much clearer pictures, but by no means all the answers ...." and there is still lots of scope for individual studies of birds in winter.

*Stan da Prato*

**Birds of New Guinea** by B. McP. Beehler, T.K. Pratt and D.A. Zimmerman; Princeton University Press; 1986; 370pp (over 700 spp); 55 plates; 16 drawings; 4 maps; £43.40, £25.20 (S).

The first field guide to the whole of New Guinea.

The large format puts the book beyond pocket size, but with over 700 species it could hardly be smaller without sacrificing legibility or text. Problems of identification are kept firmly in mind, with concise notes on description, similar species, habits (which includes habitat), voice and range. The plates (47 in colour) illustrate 600 species. Maps as detailed as the one given for central PNG, covering the whole island, could have been combined to improve the gazetteer. Species maps would aid the text on ranges. Waders, ducks, fruit doves, pigeons and parrots could all benefit from flight plates. The Birds of Paradise are realistic and colourful but the male Sickle Bills suffer from overcrowding. These are minor quibbles in a beautifully produced and authoritative, but very expensive, work.

*Stuart Murray*

**The Birds of Yorkshire** by John R. Mather; Croom Helm; 1986; 613pp; many maps; line drawings; black and white photographs; £40.

A local avifauna on the grand scale covering the history of ornithology in Yorkshire, bird protection, local photographers and sites of special interest. The main part of the book is devoted to exhaustive species accounts. An invaluable book for the dedicated Yorkshire ornithologist, but expensive for the casual visitor.

**The New Where to Watch Birds** by J. Gooders; Andrew Deutsch; 1986; 224pp; many maps; £7.95.

Judging by the 50 pages devoted to Scottish sites, this book is unlikely to be of much help to the exploring birdwatcher. Some of the contact information is incorrect (eg Isle of May bookings are NOT handled by NCC), as is the spelling of many place names. Directional details are often too brief to be useful and few, if any, of the Scottish site maps justify the space they occupy. Islands accessible only by charter boat are given a disproportionate amount of space while many good mainland sites receive credit for only a small part of their interest. St. Abb's Head, for example, is referred to only as a seabird colony. Finally, to a Scot, it is definitely disconcerting to find Orkney and Shetland included in a section headed 'North-East Scotland', and a map of the Ayrshire coast labelled 'Clyde Estuary'!

*V.M. Thom*

**The Fall of a Sparrow** by Salim Ali; Oxford University Press, New Delhi; 1985; 265pp; 71 b & w photos, 8pp facsimile letters and bird records; £10.

Every bird watcher who has visited India since the Second World War will have used Salim Ali's books.

In this autobiography Salim Ali, now over 90, describes his childhood and his struggles to find jobs. He spent nine years in Burma, studying birds in his spare time, apart from a two-year break back in Bombay, during which he completed a degree course in zoology. After many struggles this led to his working for the Bombay Natural History Society, of which he ultimately became Curator and Honorary Secretary, and to his study of avian taxonomy under Stresemann in Berlin.

The descriptions of his various ornithological surveys of the Indian States I found particularly fascinating, especially his stories of camping trips with Richard Meinertzhagen. The funding of these surveys depended on Salim's powers of persuading maharajahs that they were a good thing! Truly a remarkable man.

*W.G. Harper*

**What's That Bird** by Peter Hayman and Michael Everett; RSPB/Croom Helm; 1986; 80pp; many colour illustrations; £8.95.

**The Birdlife of Britain and Europe** by Peter Hayman and Philip Burton; RSPB/Mitchell Beazley; 1986; 272pp; many colour illustrations and maps; £12.95.

Revised editions of these two popular books, both illustrated by Peter Hayman, will be welcomed by beginners and experienced birdwatchers alike. Both are designed to be used at home. *The Birdlife of Britain and Europe* devotes a page to each species in the familiar Mitchell Beazley style. Owners of the Mitchell Beazley *Birdwatchers Pocket Guide* will recognise many of the illustrations, but will also be pleased with the "extras" presented here. Each set of illustrations is accompanied by text and a map. *What's that Bird* groups species by habitat, a system which can be difficult to use, each species having a short explanatory text by it. *Birdlife* is the "meatier" of the two but both are attractive and useful.



## THE ATLAS OF WINTERING BIRDS IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Compiled by  
PETER LACK

This companion volume to *The Atlas of Breeding Birds* is derived from the surveys of birds present in the winters of 1981/82, 1982/83 and 1983/84. There are full-page two-colour maps for 192 main species, each faced by a page of text commenting on the survey results, the species generally and the distribution as mapped. In addition there are introductory chapters by Dr Lack on the maps, the weather in the three winters, bird patterns and movements; appendices describe the planning, organisation, field methods, and the processing of data from record cards to computer output and maps. A team of 23 artists, led by Robert Gillmor, has provided the illustrations which head the species accounts.

448 pages, £19.00 net

## The Sparrowhawk

by IAN NEWTON

Dr Newton's detailed monograph of this widely distributed species is largely the product of 24 years research and fieldwork in SW Scotland. There are 38 drawings by Keith Brockie, over 80 diagrams and a section of photographs.

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## Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 April for the June number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries — and suggestions — will be welcomed by the Editor. Information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in SB 14(1).

## SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:

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Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

## SOC Notices

### Annual Conference

This autumn will see the SOC Annual Conference at a new venue and an earlier date - the Pollock Halls, University of Edinburgh during the weekend of 11th-13th September 1987. After many years at the Marine Hotel, North Berwick, the annual conference moves by popular demand to a more central location. Also taken into consideration by the SOC Council was the escalation in the cost of staying in the Marine Hotel - £70 in 1987 compared with £50 in 1986.

Pollock Halls are near the centre of Edinburgh, next to the Commonwealth Pool and on the edge of Holyrood Park. The famous bird sanctuary of Duddingston Loch is within easy walking distance. Pollock has modern halls of residence with an almost unlimited number of single and two bedded rooms - no more accommodation problems!

The theme of this year's conference is Scottish farming and birds. The programme, yet to be finalised, will follow the successful formula of the 1985 conference on forestry and birds with speakers from organizations with differing views. Full details of the programme and booking form will be included in the June mailing to members.

### Susan Mackenzie

As members already know, Pat Webster, the membership secretary, left last Christmas. Her replacement, Susan Mackenzie, started in January as personal assistant to John Davies. The job combines that of membership secretary and secretary to the Secretary, if you see what we mean! Susan is 23 and comes from Forres in Morayshire. She's a graduate in modern languages from Aberdeen University and has recently completed a post-graduate secretarial course in Edinburgh.

### Highland Birdwatching Weekend

St Andrews Branch will be having a Spring weekend birdwatching in the Highlands at the end of May. For further details please apply to Miss D E Rowling, St Anthony's Rest, Star of Markinch, Fife KY7 6LE. Tel 0592 758447.

### Summer Field Trips

Details of this summer's branch field trips are printed on a separate sheet enclosed with this issue of *Scottish Bird News*.

### Borders Branch AGM

This will be held along with the Member's Night on Monday 30th March and not on 6th April as in the syllabus. Venue and time are unchanged.

### New Secretary to the Scottish Birds Records Committee

Ron Forrester has taken over from Alan Brown (Longniddry, East Lothian) as Secretary to the SBRC. Correspondence for the SBRC should now be sent to Ron at Tyrol, Leswalt High Road, Stranraer, Wigtownshire DG9 0ED.

### East Lothian recorders

Peter Gordon is now helping Alan Brown in East Lothian. Please send records to Peter at 1-3 Craigielaw Cottages, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0PY. Other enquiries to Alan at 23 Kings Court, Longniddry, East Lothian, EH32 0QP.

### Change of local recorder

GRAMPIAN (except Moray) - all local or national rarity records to Brian Stewart, 36 Leggart Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 5JD.

## Colour-ringed Snow Buntings

As part of a study on the movements and site fidelity of Snow Buntings in winter, several hundred Snow Buntings have been colour-ringed in Caithness this winter. It is not too late in the year yet to see Snow Buntings, and you may already have seen some colour-ringed birds. If any birds with colour rings are spotted I would be delighted to hear the details; where and when they were seen and what the ring colours were. Thanks for your help. H. Clark, 3 Lindsay Place, Wick, Caithness.

## Colour-ringed Golden Plovers

The Lothian Ringing Group has recently colour-ringed 80 Golden Plovers in the Lothians. We hope this will help us to work out how the wintering flocks move around the Lothians and to find the breeding areas of local wintering birds. Please help us by telling us if you see a colour-ringed Golden Plover. Each bird has two colour-rings on the right leg - one below and one above the 'knee'. Sightings on either the wintering or breeding grounds would be very valuable. If you can tell us the flock size and how many Golden Plover you were able to check for colour-rings this would also be most useful. Please send sightings to: Nigel Clark, Zoology Dept, West Mains Road, Edinburgh EH9 3JT.

## Small ads

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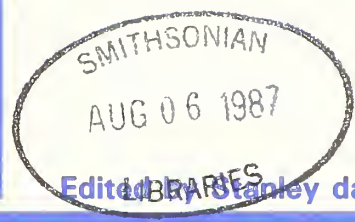


THE SCOTTISH  
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

# Scottish Bird News

JUNE 1987  
ISSN 0268-3199

No.6



## Turning the tide with oil

Oil pollution continues to exact an unnecessary toll on our seabirds. Until recently humane destruction was generally considered the kindest way to deal with the victims but the opening of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals cleaning centre means there is now a more positive alternative.

The Centre is situated at Middlebank Farm, near Inverkeithing, in Fife and just off the Edinburgh-Perth motorway. Good communications were seen as an important plus in choosing the site as it aims to deal with birds from any part of Scotland as well as the North of England.

### Lessons from the south

Middlebank's methods are based on those used in the RSPCA's centre at Taunton, in SW England. Arriving birds are usually suffering from stress as well as the effects of oil and hunger. They are given tablets which help flush out the oil and also contain antibiotics to counteract enteritis. They are also fed - forcibly if necessary - but cleaning is delayed for some days to allow the birds to build up their strength for what is a fairly traumatic experience. Effective cleaning involves really thorough washing with detergent and warm water, followed by equally thorough rinsing to remove all residues of both oil and cleaning agent. The birds are then dried using warm air blowers before release back to the wild, birds are tested for buoyancy several times. To measure the effectiveness of the work the Lothian Ringing Group will ring all the birds before release. This will take place at the nearest point on the east or west coast, depending on the origin of the birds, to avoid the stress of long road journeys back to the point where the birds came ashore.

### Volunteers to the fore

Cleaning oiled birds is hard work which, in the case of a big spill, can mean 15 hour days for Mrs Sandra Hogben, the Centre Supervisor, and her teams of volunteers. Washing one bird can demand two hours uninterrupted supply of hot water and Sandra is keen to emphasize that it is much better for the birds if they are brought to Middlebank as quickly as possible, and not cared for by people in their houses, which do not have the same facilities.



Great Northern and White-billed Divers oiled in the Dornoch Firth.

Stanley da Prato.

### Ducks to divers

The Centre's first customers were domestic ducks from a pond contaminated by diesel oil. Needless to say it was not long before the first seabirds came in, from a spill in the Dornoch Firth. When *SBN* visited Middlebank in March around 300 birds were being cleaned. Most were Guillemots but there were also Razorbills, Shags, Long-tailed Ducks and, perhaps saddest of all, several Great Northern Divers and one badly oiled White-billed Diver. Several auks and one of the divers were calling and hearing these sounds, which epitomize wild coasts and northern fjords to many birdwatchers, in the Fife countryside seemed to emphasize how much influence, for good or bad, human beings now have on wild creatures.

### Costs and benefits

The Centre represents a big investment by the SSPCA. Conversion costs alone were in excess of £65,000 and running costs when many birds are being treated are also high. Quite apart from the cost, simply getting enough small fish to keep

several hundred seabirds going can be a headache. Given that most of our seabird populations seem able to withstand the toll of oil is the venture a sensible use of resources? The obvious dedication shown by all concerned provides one answer, but by no means the only one. The Centre hopes for a success rate of around 70% which could be important, especially as some seabird populations no longer seem to be growing as they were a few years ago. Perhaps the most valuable role for a centre like Middlebank is in the long term, as more and more volunteers and visitors have their concern for wild birds kindled and strengthened by the experience of seeing and caring for the victims of human carelessness.

**The Centre can be contacted on 0383-412520. Visitors are welcome but please contact the Centre in advance to see if your visit is convenient - during an oiling incident it is not! Volunteers are especially welcome during weekdays. Donations can be sent either directly to the Centre or the SSPCA at 19 Melville Street, Edinburgh.**

## Editorial

### Getting Involved

This issue of *SBN* covers a variety of topics but they all have one thing in common which is that people went out into the Scottish countryside and did something positive. Some of the activities demand a huge commitment of time which is why only a few individuals are able to live for years on seabird colonies but there are many other opportunities to do useful things and still earn one's living and fulfil family responsibilities. There really is tremendous scope for doing more and anyone should be able to find something that suits his or her personality and resources, whether building nestboxes or surveying their local wood or bun. Don't be put off by the feeling that "that's for the experts". Most bird census work in Britain is still carried out by amateurs while even the professionals started off this way. If you want to do something but don't know who to contact 21 Regent Terrace should be able to advise you.

### ----- and let us know about it

When you have something that you think could be of interest to other members why not write about it? We are always interested in short communications, especially from the branches. Some branches already send the Editor their newsletters; he is grateful and hopes they keep coming in so items of wider interest can be extracted - some are in this issue. Not everything is suitable for *SBN*, nor does every branch have a newsletter, which makes us wonder how many interesting things we never hear about - so if you are doing a survey or have a successful fund raising event why not give us the details?

### Predators and persecution

*We very much regret that the two paragraphs on Golden Eagle and Peregrine in Central Scotland were transposed in the Raptor Study Group Report in the March issue. We also managed to get a digit wrong in the RSPB's phone number which should read 031-556 5624.*

*Several readers have expressed concern at the number of foxes killed in the Reconciliation Project on Grouse and Grazing Animals in Renfrewshire and Ayrshire and one has raised the point that some of the snares used by one keeper may have been of an inhumane, and illegal, type though the evidence was not considered sufficient by the authorities to bring a prosecution.*

## Italian Gunfire over Strathbeg

The most important confrontation over wildlife conservation during the course of North Sea oil development occurred when it was suddenly revealed at the end of 1972 that it was proposed to bring the northern gas pipelines ashore across the largest dune slack lake in Britain, the Loch of Strathbeg, to a terminal located on an old airfield at Crimond on its inner margin. All the conservation organisations rallied to its defence, and, after three months of mounting controversy, it was decided to divert the pipelines three miles south to St Fergus and to use the airfield for a less offensive naval radiocommunication station instead.

The loch is among other things a major staging-post for migrating wildfowl, and the RSPB subsequently bought some of the surrounding land and leased the rest as a nature reserve, installing a former gamekeeper, Jim Dunbar, as warden. He has had exceptional success in controlling poaching which was formerly rife while maintaining excellent relations with the local wildfowlers. In consequence the area now attracts up to 36,000 geese and swans at the height of the autumn migration, including nearly a quarter of the world population of Pink-footed Geese with growing numbers remaining for the winter.

One of the three main landowners has given up shooting and assisted the RSPB, and while the other two retained the right to shoot in the winter, this was originally exercised in a moderate way so that it attracted little attention. Following the retirement of an enlightened manager of one of these estates belonging to Mr Duthac Carnegie, brother of the Earl of Southesk, there has recently been growing complaint about the conduct of an Italian syndicate including the Marquese Divulci Gugliemi who rent the shooting. When the loch was renotified as an SSSI under the Wildlife and Countryside Act the NCC proposed the introduction of a ban on shooting from a peninsula and the islands in the centre of the loch, said to comprise about a tenth of the whole.

The landowner refused to accept this despite repeated offers of compensation, and shooting was resumed at what appeared to be an increased level in the winter of 1985-86. The NCC eventually advised the Secretary of State to impose the ban under Section 29 of the Act the following autumn. The landowner appealed, and was joined by the British Association for Shooting and

Conservation, who are opposed to the use of coercion and apparently wish to make this a test case, and the local branch of the National Farmers' Union, who consider the geese harmful to agriculture and want compensation for their presence. A Public Inquiry was therefore opened in Peterhead on 24 March 1987.

The NCC introduced their case with a large volume of evidence to the general effect that informed people consider the loch is of international importance for its wildfowl (with which the other side enthusiastically agreed), and that they dislike being shot in the middle of their roost (which it was suggested lacks "scientific proof"). Local witnesses then reported that the syndicate, which has taken the lease for £12,000 per annum, behave in a disorderly manner, leaving dead and injured birds around and throwing numbers of bodies away before their departure.

It was replied that shooting is an established tradition, that many of the problems have been caused by a bad keeper who is being replaced, and that while the number of geese shot may have increased from 350 a year in the early 1970s to 987 last winter, the number of birds has increased even faster, so that they have become a pest which cost one of the local farmers £25,000 in lost production in 1985 - though mainly after the end of the shooting season, when only one person has previously bothered to apply for a licence to control them.

When the inquiry resumed on 8 May Mr Carnegie announced that in future he was prepared to terminate shooting on the peninsula and islands an hour before sunset. While originally a "little bit miffed" at the controversy, when the RSPB lease of his land for £50 per annum runs out shortly he would still be prepared to renew it on similar terms. He also asked for his costs. The preparation of the report on the inquiry is being accelerated in the hope that the Secretary of State may be able to arrive at a decision whether to renew the Order by the time it runs out at the end of June.

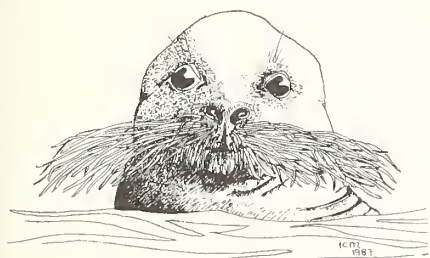
It is notable that while it is now apparently possible to charge foreign nationals substantial sums for the right to shoot our growing goose population, the money does not appear to go to the farmers who bear the main burden of feeding them. It seems time for the formulation of a more coherent national policy for both their conservation and exploitation.

*W.R.P. Bourne*

# Recent Reports

*These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record, nor will they be indexed. Please send reports to Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland, via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period January to March is covered here.*

The discovery of a **White-billed Diver** and a **King Eider** on 14th January in Shetland preceded a remarkable series of rarities in the islands which included no less than 3 **White-billed Divers**, at least 4 **King Eiders** and a **Surf Scoter**. The icing on the cake was the first **Harlequin Duck** in Britain for 22 years and only the third ever live **Brunnich's Guillemot** in Britain. At least 300 twitchers saw these birds. There was no bad behaviour and the ferry, airline and car-hire companies benefited from this unseasonal influx of visitors. Along with all the rare birds were 2 **Harp Seals**, the first since 1903 and yet another visitor from the Arctic, a **Bearded Seal**.



*Bearded Seal* Iain MacLeod

Shetland had 3 **Black-throated Divers** whilst there were 4 in Orkney. **Great Northern Divers** reached 39 off Nesting in January and 33 in Quendale Bay in February, whilst Shetland also had 3 **White-billed Divers**. **Great Crested Grebes** turned up in Shetland (3) and Orkney with others in Aberdeen and Banff. A **Red-necked Grebe** was at Achnahaird Bay but Gosford had an impressive total of 50 and a remarkable count of 125 **Slavonian Grebes**. An influx of the latter species brought 20 to Tresta, Shetland, 7 to the Loch of Harray and 9 to the Cromarty Firth. A **Black-necked Grebe** was seen in South Uist in January.

The **Hermaness Black-browed Albatross** returned on 16th February for its 17th year. One or two **Blue Fulmars** passed Peterhead on several days during the period and an early **Manx Shearwater** was seen off the Rhum ferry on 16th January.

A **Bittern** spent the winter at Duddingston, but the Orkney **Glossy Ibis** was last seen just before the hard weather in mid January. **Greenland White-fronted Geese** reached a record total of 79 at the Loons in Orkney. A **Snow Goose** was seen at Newburgh, Aberdeenshire where there were also 4 **Canada Geese**. Records of **Brent Geese** included a series of sightings in Aberdeenshire with a maximum of 200 on the Ythan. **Drake American Wigeon** were at Loch Fleet and Culbin in January and the female **Red-crested Pochard** was last seen in Orkney on 14th January. **Scaup** peaked at 160 on the Cromarty Firth. In Shetland there were at least 3 male and a female **King Eider** whilst an immature male was at Wick and 2 adult males

at Embo. The immature male **Harlequin Duck** which was such a crowd-puller stayed in Sullom Voe from 16th January to 21st February, when Shetland also held an immature male **Surf Scoter**. Two male and a female **Surf Scoters** were seen at Gosford and in Largo Bay. A **Red-head Smew** appeared in Shetland with 2 in Orkney, 1 at Thurso, 4 in Aberdeenshire and 3 in Lothian, with single males there and at Strathbeg. A February influx of **Goosanders** brought birds to Shetland and Orkney.

Two immature **Sea Eagles** appeared in Orkney and another was in Benbecula and South Uist. In January a **Rough-legged Buzzard** was in Shetland. The first **Osprey** was back in the Highlands on 31st March.

**Grey Plover** totalled 129 at South Ford in the Western Isles where a **Spotted Red-shank** wintered. A **Greenshank** was at Peterhead on 7th February and the first **Bonxie** was back in Shetland on 24th March. Single **Mediterranean Gulls** were seen at Girdleness, Peterhead and in Ayrshire, where there was also a **Ring-billed Gull**. The first **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** arrived back in Shetland on 8th March and North Uist on 9th. A report of a melanistic **Herring Gull** on Whalsay was unusual as melanism is very rare in gulls. **Iceland Gulls** were scarce this winter with reports of only 16 in Shetland, 3 at Sule Skerry with another elsewhere in Orkney, 2 in the West Highlands, 1 at Scrabster and 4 in North-east Scotland. The adult **Kumlien's Gull** again spent the winter at Banff. **Glaucous Gulls** were also few and far between with a maximum of 12 in North-east Scotland including 6 adults at Fraserburgh, where there was also a **Glaucous** x **Herring Gull** hybrid. A **Sandwich Tern** was off Girdleness on 28th March and 4 were back in Orkney on 30th.



*Bittern* Iain MacLeod

Britain's 3rd, live **Brunnich's Guillemot** was off Hamnavoe, Shetland from 3rd to 7th February and brought many of the **Harlequin** twitchers back to the islands. Amazingly a second bird (unfortunately dead) was found in the same place on 7th January. Single **Little Auks** were off Peterhead in January and February and **Puffins** returned to Fair Isle on the very early date of 23rd March.

The male **Snowy Owl** near Stromness would have been a welcome sight to the 2 females still present on Fetlar. **Long-eared Owls** reached maxima of 6 at Strand, Shetland, 8 at Binscarth, 13 at Berstane and 14 in Kirkwall with a single at Stonehaven. A **Kingfisher** wintered on the River Ness.



*Shore Lark* Iain MacLeod

**Shore Larks** reached a peak of 6 at Tynninghame. **Barns Ness** produced a count of 22 **Scandinavian Rock Pipits** in late March and the first **White Wagtail** passed through Shetland on 26th March. A good scattering of **Waxwings** from early January included 2 to 3 in Shetland, at least 9 in Orkney, 3 in Stornoway, parties of 2-8 at 5 localities in the Highlands where counts included 17 at Lossiemouth, 17 at Culduthel, 19 at Forres and 20 at South Kessock. Aberdeenshire had 3-16 at 3 sites with a high count of 40 in Aberdeen. The highest count in Lothian was 12 at Yellowcraig.

Small numbers of **Dunnocks** and **Robins** arrived in Shetland from 26th to 29th March where there were also about 25 **Black Redstarts**, including 6 at Sumburgh Head. Fair Isle had 4 **Black Redstarts** and 1 was seen at Ackergill, Caithness. The first returning **Wheatears** were in South Uist and at Peterhead on 25th March. Amongst a small fall of Scandinavian thrushes in Shetland in late March were at least 11 **Mistle Thrushes**.

Wintering **Blackcaps** were well distributed and included 2 in Orkney, where a **Chiffchaff** also spent the winter. Another wintered in Shetland along with 3 or 4 **Goldcrests**. A **Rook** on a fishing boat 70 miles west of Foula on 21st March must have been a migrant, whilst 18 **Ravens** on Fair Isle were probably wanderers from Orkney or Shetland. Large flocks of **Brambling** were seen at Bridge of Don (300), and the Forest of Birse (250). A **Linnet** reached South Uist and 6 **Mealy Redpolls** appeared at the Bridge of Don. Four large **Northern Bullfinches** occurred in Shetland in late March along with 2 **Hawfinches**. **Lapland Buntings** reached a maximum of 48 at Musselburgh in March.

*Pete Ellis*

## More on mink

For such small animals feral American Mink can certainly raise heated debates among naturalists and other outdoor types. They are, undoubtedly, here to stay but how much of an effect they are having on native species is still controversial. Comments by several fieldworkers in the last issue of SBN, who felt Mink were responsible for local declines in river birds, have prompted further comments from several sources.

Events on a small loch to the south of Edinburgh provide an example of how many keepers and anglers, as well as birdwatchers, have come to regard Mink as serious pests. A Mute Swan, apparently in poor health, arrived on the water but only survived for a few days. It was found dead one morning, well out from the shore with its throat ripped open. Judging by the wounds and the feathers floating around the corpse there had been a considerable struggle on the water rather than by the bank. There was no sign of Otters but Mink were definitely present (11 killed that season alone) and a fishing hut had to be moved due to Mink taking up residence beneath it. When it was moved the remains of three or four Perch and 18-24 birds (apparently duck and Coot) were found. If Mink were responsible for the attack on the Swan this would be atypical, perhaps due to the bird's weak condition.

Local declines in smaller species, such as Moorhens, seem much more common. Several workers in the Lothians have experienced dramatic declines in Moorhen and most observers are sure Mink are responsible. Particularly interesting observations, which should soon appear in *Scottish Birds*, have come from Gladhouse Reservoir where numbers of breeding water birds dropped dramatically around the time Mink appeared but staged a comeback when keepers, stung into action when Mink wrecked havoc in pheasant rearing pens, began to control the Mink.

Why then are Mink so controversial? The problem is that although Mink may have a dramatic effect locally there is a dearth of evidence of any national decline in water birds that can be attributed to Mink. The B.T.O.'s Common Bird Census and Waterways Bird Survey do not show big declines in species such as Coot and Moorhen, although it can be argued that in Scotland WBS coverage needs to be considerably increased to give a proper picture. Even when water birds do decline other causes must be considered - Mute Swans, for example, have declined around Edinburgh but vandalism is almost certainly the major factor here.

Studies of the diet of Mink show that they are opportunist feeders that take whatever is readily available and that birds are often only a small part of their diet. In one of the few studies of Scottish Mink David Jenkins and Rosemary Harper found that Mink from Deeside were mainly eating Rabbits and other small mammals (*J. Animal Ecology*, 1980). Given that Mink are now part of our fauna it can be argued that, except on special areas such as Nature Reserves with colonies of ground nesting birds, it is better to let Mink establish a natural population level than to create a 'vacuum effect' by trapping and thus set up a flow of new animals which could cause more damage than a few, established territory holders.

One point that does emerge from all this is the urgent need for more hard facts. Far too many birdwatchers have failed to put their observations down on paper, or to become involved in proper monitoring work, whether for the B.T.O. or more local surveys - so how about changing this in 1987?

SdP



Whooper Swan

William S. Paton

## Mixed feelings on Whoopers

Several years ago a large flock of Whooper Swans spent some weeks on floodwater near Carsehead, Madderty. Local residents remember this with mixed feelings.

Unfortunately, over the floodwater was a power line into which a Whooper flew occasionally with disastrous results - not always for the swans - but certainly for the residents in the area who were then without electricity for several hours. Engineers came each time equipped with a dinghy because the water was deep.

Eventually the pole and power line were moved. Locals feel, however, that it was not for high conservation ideals or consideration for the residents. The decision was taken after the engineers' dinghy capsized and the men were thoroughly soaked one dark winter night!

Whoopers have been there this winter without incident.

Irene McKinnie

## Red-breasted Merganser's large creche

On 13 July 1986 J. Bell and I came upon a female Red-breasted Merganser in charge of a crèche of exactly 50 ducklings, all of which were about 1/3 grown, swimming in a quiet backwater on the edge of The Mound Alderswamp, South-East Sutherland. During a 10 minute watch we saw no sign of a second female. On three or four occasions the female flew up, circled around the area and, each time, returned to the ducklings within a minute. These flights may have been due to our presence.

There are numerous records of two or more females in charge of large crèches, sometimes numbering hundreds of ducklings, but the only reference I can find where the number of young with one female in charge is in Donald Watson's *Birds of Moor and Mountain* where he refers to two crèches on Lake Myvatn, Iceland, where one female was in charge of 33 ducklings and the other of 52.

D. Macdonald

## Fair Isle

Awards are made annually from two Funds to assist young people, between the ages of 15 and 21, with a grant towards the cost of travel to Fair Isle and their stay at the Observatory. In recent years some 6/8 awards of between £60 and £100 have been made each year from the **John Harrison Memorial Fund** which is administered by the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust. The **Ian Pitman Scholarship Fund**, administered by the National Trust for Scotland, was only recently set up and the first award from this Fund, £100, was made this year.

Successful applicants are responsible for making their own travel arrangements, and booking at the Observatory where they are required to stay for a minimum of one week. Information about the Observatory, and activities or work which might be undertaken during their stay, must be obtained direct from the Warden or his wife on Fair Isle. Applications for a grant from either Fund must be submitted by 31 October at the latest, and will be considered by the administering committee in mid-December, when grants for the year following are made.

Application forms can be obtained respectively from the **Hon. Secretary, J.H.M.F., 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT**, or the **Hon. Secretary, Ian Pitman Scholarship Fund, c/o N.T.S., 5 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh EH2 4DU**.

# Nest Boxing

Once upon a time there was a Famous Forestry Man, who was known as "Nestbox McKenzie". Of course, as an employee of the Commission, he had powers of access not available to ordinary mortals. On his retirement, the practice of nest boxing on a major scale seems largely to have died away in Scotland until the early 1970's, apart from a few isolated schemes, such as those around Loch Ken in Galloway and in the Ayrshire valleys. The seminal study of Pied Flycatchers in the Forest of Dean in Monmouthshire showed, however, what could be done by enthusiasts not necessarily professional ornithologists, and in this project it can be argued the current upsurge in nest boxing had its origin.

It is not the function of this article to detail the techniques and practices of nestboxing. These can be readily found in the B.T.O. Nestbox Guide, recently revised and reprinted, and still excellent value. Bang up to the minute, it embodies the 'state of the art' and it is always interesting to see that others have arrived at conclusions one has reached oneself by a process of trial and error over a long period.

You may ask 'Why Nestboxes?' when it is too late now to put them up for this year, and the autumn might



Blue Tit

Robert Gillmor

be deemed more appropriate for this subject. However, now is the time to search out suitable sites, patches of woodland or 'birdy' hedgerows (if there are any left), to find the places birds like, and visit to breed, and where in the autumn boxes might profitably be put up.

The list of species to go for is extensive. Tits of several species will use boxes and one can aim for others than the ubiquitous Blue Tit. A double brooded Coal Tit once reared 19 young in broods of ten and nine in a box of the writer's in Perthshire birch scrub. Few sights are more appealing than a pair of Pied Flycatchers (who take particularly readily to boxes) or of Redstarts, feeding young. The latter, in the age of Sahelian

drought, need all the help they can get. Of the larger species, Tawny Owls take readily to boxes (although in some years they do not breed at all) and if you fail with them, there's always hope of a Kestrel or a Stock Dove. Grey Squirrels are not welcome! Your friendly local ringer will be only too pleased if you ask him to ring the young and will advise you of recoveries. West Perthshire Blue Tits really do go down to the fleshpots of Bearsden and Milngavie in the winter!

So have a look round this spring and see if you cannot find a site for a few boxes in the autumn. Recent nest boxing schemes have very substantially increased our population of Pied Flycatchers (for instance), yet there is scope for further increase still. There is a very real sense of satisfaction and achievement in seeing a pair of any species select and use a box you have put up. Although birds are not particular and do not demand a masterpiece of the carpenter's art, if you cannot knock a few boxes together yourself, your favourite charity will almost certainly be glad to make some in return for a contribution and will welcome this way of fundraising. If all else fails, a certain distillery produces 20 year old malt in a box ideally suited for further service as a nest box. The contents do happen to cost over £100 the bottle, but think of the celebration when the box is in place and occupied.

Henry Robb



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Choose from Eileach an Naoimh with its ruined monastery and beehive cell, the soaring limestone cliffs of Garvellach, Dun Chonnuill with its Fort and Dun, or A'Chuli, all Sites of Special Scientific interest; or Eilean Dubh Mor, Eilean Dubh Baeg and Guirasdeal with their Common Seal colonies; or 1470 ft. high Scarba with its Raised Beaches and caves; and spectacular Little Corryvreckan Whirlpool; or rocky Ormsa and Liath Sgeir; Fiola Meadhonach and Eilean nan Caen where the wild otters live or Fiola an Droma with its tidal rapids and more seals, and peaceful Lunga with its hidden nooks and crannies, red deer, and big sandy bay where Saint Columba landed. A choice for all weathers and tastes, all privately owned by caring landowners who permit you the privilege of exploring them while staying at Ru'a Fiola.

Over a traditional Scottish breakfast we will decide on the islands for the day, and we take you there with a packed lunch, you are then free to 'do your own thing' until the boat picks you up in the afternoon to return you to Ru'a Fiola, for a big hot meal. Alternatively we can provide Tent or Prehistoric Cave, and stove, food and sleeping bag for an overnight stay in blissful solitude, if you are really adventurous.

On Ru'a Fiola accommodation is single or twin-bedded rooms with heating. Facilities are on Hostel lines and fairly basic as per the Adventure Course Prospectus available on request. Maximum number of participants is 12, no maximum age! Weeks start Saturdays 19th September, 26th September, 3rd October and 31st October 1987, and end the following Fridays. Our boat will meet you at the start of your stay at 3.30 pm at Cullipool Pier, Isle of Luing, to where there is easy access by car and by public transport. The all-inclusive cost of the week, from Cullipool, for the six nights, is £165.00 including VAT.

To book, send your requirements and a Deposit of £33.00 to Ru'a Fiola; or if you require more details, or information on our **Island Castaway and Survival Courses for Adults, Ghosthunters' Week or Youngsters' Adventure Courses**, write to Torquil Johnson-Ferguson at Ru'a Fiola.

# The Sentinel of the Forth

It is given to a few special islands to thrill the visitor with a combination of natural splendour, man's artefacts and, teeming wildlife. The Bass Rock is one of them. A mere rock, some might say, 350 feet high, and with little more than seven acres of flattish surface, it is dwarfed by many other Scottish islands. But statistics can deceive. The soaring, round-shouldered east cliffs seem magnificently more than their actual height while the dark north-west precipice has a grim and forbidding air.

Yet the Bass is easy of access and admirably served by boat from North Berwick. On any fine day in summer, and some not so fine, Fred Marr will run visitors across the 3½ miles of the Firth of Forth and land them on the Bass for a few hours. It is one of the most rewarding trips one can make. No other island in Scotland, except Handa, is at once so near to the mainland, so full of seabirds, and yet so untamed and unspoilt. And Handa lacks the king of seabirds, the Gannet.

The Bass is made of basalt, the plug of an extinct volcano. Its sharp angles remain unblunted by the erosive power of the sea over the millennia and anybody who has been on the Bass during a severe gale will appreciate that ..... "had the Bass originally been composed of such a yielding tuff as that on which the fortress of Tantallon is erected we would now in vain seek its place amidst the waters." On the north-west is what I take to be the remains of the ancient caldera, though I am no geologist. One can see the remains of one wall, now the small inland cliff just below the summit of the rock. Circled by impregnable cliffs, the Bass falls away more gently to the south and on that side the garrison walls were built by an early Scottish king, perhaps in the twelfth century. The stone is mostly from the rock itself, and harmonises exactly. These stout walls seal the Bass, with a cannon embrasure running at right angles to the fortification and guarding the inner landing. In those days, visitors were hauled up by basket, for there were no landing steps. We often used a similar method to winch lighthouse keepers on to the rock when a rough sea besieged the landing.

Nowadays there is a helicopter pad on the outer apron of rock, and the 'keepers arrive in style. Before long there will be an even more momentous change when the light becomes automatic and all personnel are withdrawn, leaving the rock uninhabited. The only 'back entrance' is a steep, narrow gully, at its base is the seal-haunted entrance to a gloomy tunnel, 'a dreary recess, full of chill airs and dropping damp'. This tunnel emerges at the base of the beetling east cliffs - caves which in season are resonant with gargling Guillemots and sepulchral croaking Shags.

Above the lighthouse are the remains of St. Baldred's chapel, where my wife and I lived for three years between 1961 and 1963. Consecrated in 1492, it was used more as an ammunition store than a place of worship, though even as the latter it had been long preceded by the venerable saint himself, whose simple cell is ascribed to the 6th or 7th century. Between the chapel and the summit lie the remains of the walled garrison garden, even in my day lovingly tended but now submerged beneath the rampant growth of Yorkshire Fog. But still, every spring, the small wild Daffodils, goodness knows how old, peep



out yet again. And just as it has done for hundreds of years the garrison well yields its seepage water, the colour of strong urine. That water, sprinkled with a little oatmeal to disguise the taste imparted, perhaps, by the rotting carcass of a sheep, (Bass mutton used to be famous) was all the ill-fated Covenanters, imprisoned in the reign of Charles II, had to drink in their unheated dungeons.

The auld craig, 'unwinnabill by ingine of man' has seen momentous events, civil, military and ecclesiastic, but its natural history also demands our attention. Notable among Bass plants is the Tree Mallow, a biennial whose tall purple spikes mantle parts of the southern and eastern slopes. Sea Campion, Pink Campion and Sea Scurvy are also much in evidence but Sea Pink is oddly absent. Of the grasses, a fine *Deschampsia* turf, once ubiquitous, has in some areas been replaced by coarser grasses, such as Cocksfoot and Yorkshire Fog, encouraged by the Herring Gulls. But the gulls are decreasing. Small passerines are scarce but Rock Pipits, Dunnocks, House Sparrows, Starlings and Pied Wagtails breed each year and Blackbirds sometimes. There is often a Mallard's nest near the chapel and usually an Eider or two on the battlement slopes among the Mallow. The ducklings face a hazardous journey across the sea to shallower water, and probably few succeed.



*The Bass Rock from the south-west. Top, The Gannets of the north-west slope. Opposite, Gannet and five week old chick. Photographs by J. Bryan Nelson*



But it is for the seabirds that one visits the Bass. Here, one can immerse oneself without the barriers of artificial restraints and yet with complete regard for the well-being of the birds. Before climbing to the summit - an easy task - there are the Shags, Fulmars, Puffins and Guillemots of the battlement area. After that, a short climb to the headland provides a magnificent view across to the great west face, thronged with Gannets. Just across the gully Kittiwakes nest while at its base are Guillemots and Razorbills. Continuing up the rock, past the chapel, the top of the cliffs comes into view. Here, near to the path, are endless opportunities for close-range observation and photography. Some of my most attractive behavioural shots have been taken from here, with a 300mm. or 400mm. lens. Indeed, all the way up the eastern side new groupings and different backgrounds emerge. If the wind is strong easterly or north-easterly (in which case you will be fortunate to have landed) the impressive gathering of non-breeding 'club' birds, some 2,000 + in all stages of immaturity, will be congregated on the edges of the colony or passing and re-passing, hanging in the wind. They always prefer the windward side of the rock because landing and taking off is safer. Nowadays the north-west slope is a snowfield of Gannets where once my hide stood. There is no finer sight than this vast gathering, seen from the summit. Somewhere in the middle a few of my colour-ringed birds still survive. The Bass gannetry is increasing steadily and now numbers more than 20,000 occupied sites; which is not quite the same thing as 20,000 pairs and certainly not the same as 20,000 nests or 20,000 breeding pairs!

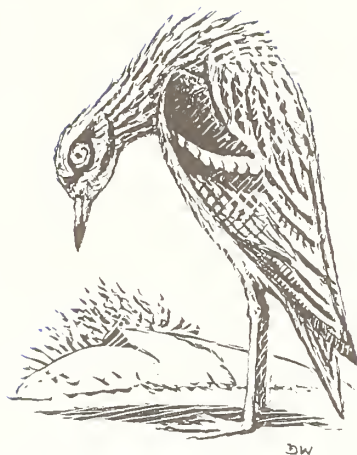
The Bass Gannets are extraordinarily tame but even they will flee if approached too closely. Disturbed Gannets lose eggs and chicks, to other Gannets, which pilfer the nest-material, and to the ever-watchful Herring Gulls. Ordinary care will ensure that this does not happen.

The best times to visit the Bass are near the beginning of the breeding season in late April or early May, when display and nest-building are at their peak, or when the young are in the nest. For most species that means June or early July, but Fulmars and Gannets go on much longer. Gannets are still in full colonial cry in August and early September though, by then, many of the black juveniles will be on their way to North African waters.

It is rare, these despoiling days, to find a magnificent and much-visited spot not only unspoilt, untrammelled by rules and totally uncommercialised, but actually better than ever. Little more than a hundred years ago, the Bass Gannets, still to recover from the annual commercial killings, were shot from boats and from the rock for 'sport'. Now, thanks to its owner, Sir Hew Hamilton Dalrymple, the rock 'callet the Bass' remains, as in Hector Boece's day, 'full of admiration and wonder, therein also is great store of Soland geese and nowhere else but in Ailsaie and this rocke'.

*J. Bryan Nelson*

***Dr Nelson has been studying the Gannets on the Bass for more than 30 years and is the author of a range of publications including The Gannet and Living with Seabirds. Fred Marr is the Bass boatman and can be contacted on North Berwick 2838.***



## WADERS

**their breeding, haunts and watchers**

by Desmond and Maimie Nethersole-Thompson

All of the Nethersole-Thompson family contribute in some measure to this book but it is Dr Desmond Nethersole-Thompson's life-long interest in waders which gives the work its exceptional quality and authority.

The core of the book is the comprehensive accounts of the biology and behaviour of 18 species of waders in their breeding haunts. In addition there are chapters on waders generally, wader spacing and dispersion, the wader watchers of past and recent times, and chapters on new or returning waders, and on those pipe-dream species that may yet breed one day in these islands. Donald Watson has provided more than 100 drawings and there are 32 photographs.

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# The Sentinel of the Forth

It is given to a few special islands to thrill the visitor with a combination of natural splendour, man's artefacts and, teeming wildlife. The Bass Rock is one of them. A mere rock, some might say, 350 feet high, and with little more than seven acres of flattish surface, it is dwarfed by many other Scottish islands. But statistics can deceive. The soaring, round-shouldered east cliffs seem magnificently more than their actual height while the dark north-west precipice has a grim and forbidding air.

Yet the Bass is easy of access and admirably served by boat from North Berwick. On any fine day in summer, and some not so fine, Fred Marr will run visitors across the 3½ miles of the Firth of Forth and land them on the Bass for a few hours. It is one of the most rewarding trips one can make. No other island in Scotland, except Handa, is it once so near to the mainland, so full of seabirds, and yet so untemed and unspoilt. And Handa lacks the king of seabirds, the Gannet.

The Bass is made of basalt, the plug of an extinct volcano. Its sharp angles remain unblunted by the erosive power of the sea over the millennia and anybody who has been on the Bass during a severe gale will appreciate that ..... "had the Bass originally been composed of such a yielding tuff as that on which the fortress of Tantallon is erected we would now in vain seek its place amidst the waters." On the north-west is what I take to be the remains of the ancient caldera, though I am no geologist. One can see the remains of one wall, now the small inland cliff just below the summit of the rock. Circled by impregnable cliffs, the Bass falls away more gently to the south and on that side the garrison walls were built by an early Scottish king, perhaps in the twelfth century. The stone is mostly from the rock itself, and harmonises exactly. These stout walls seal the Bass, with a cannon embrasure running at right angles to the fortification and guarding the inner landing. In those days, visitors were hauled up by basket, for there were no landing steps. We often used a similar method to winch lighthouse keepers on to the rock when a rough sea besieged the landing.

Nowadays there is a helicopter pad on the outer apron of rock, and the 'keepers arrive in style. Before long there will be an even more momentous change when the light becomes automatic and all personnel are withdrawn, leaving the rock uninhabited. The only 'back entrance' is a steep, narrow gully, at its base is the seal-haunted entrance to a gloomy tunnel, 'a dreary recess, full of chill airs and dropping damp'. This tunnel emerges at the base of the beetling east cliffs - caves which in season are resonant with gargling Guillemots and sepulchral croaking Shags.

Above the lighthouse are the remains of St. Baldred's chapel, where my wife and I lived for three years between 1961 and 1963. Consecrated in 1492, it was used more as an ammunition store than a place of worship, though even as the latter it had been long preceded by the venerable saint himself, whose simple cell is ascribed to the 6th or 7th century. Between the chapel and the summit lie the remains of the walled garrison garden, even in my day lovingly tended but now submerged beneath the rampant growth of Yorkshire Fog. But still, every spring, the small wild Daf-fodils, goodness knows how old, peep



out yet again. And just as it has done for hundreds of years the garrison well yields its seepage water, the colour of strong urine. That water, sprinkled with a little oatmeal to disguise the taste imparted, perhaps, by the rotting carcass of a sheep, (Bass mutton used to be famous) was all the ill-fated Covenanters, imprisoned in the reign of Charles II, had to drink in their unheated dungeons.

The auld craig, 'unwinnabill by ingine of man' has seen momentous events, civil, military and ecclesiastic, but its natural history also demands our attention. Notable among Bass plants is the Tree Mallow, a biennial whose tall purple spikes mantle parts of the southern and eastern slopes. Sea Campion, Pink Campion and Sea Scurvy are also much in evidence but Sea Pink is oddly absent. Of the grasses, a fine Deschampsia turf, once ubiquitous, has in some areas been replaced by coarser grasses, such as Cocksfoot and Yorkshire Fog, encouraged by the Herring Gulls. But the gulls are decreasing. Small passerines are scarce but Rock Pipits, Dunnocks, House Sparrows, Starlings and Pied Wagtails breed each year and Blackbirds sometimes. There is often a Mallard's nest near the chapel and usually an Eider or two on the battlement slopes among the Mallow. The ducklings face a hazardous journey across the sea to shallower water, and probably few succeed.

The Bass Rock from the south-west. Top, The Gannets of the north-west slope. Opposite, Gannet and five week old chick. Photographs by J. Bryan Nelson

But it is for the seabirds that one visits the Bass. Here, one can immerse oneself without the barriers of artificial restraints and yet with complete regard for the well-being of the birds. Before climbing to the summit - an easy task - there are the Shags, Fulmars, Puffins and Guillemots of the battlement area. After that, a short climb to the headland provides a magnificent view across to the great west face, thronged with Gannets. Just across the gully Kittiwakes nest while at its base are Guillemots and Razorbills. Continuing up the rock, past the chapel, the top of the cliffs comes into view. Here, near to the path, are endless opportunities for close-range observation and photography. Some of my most attractive behavioural shots have been taken from here, with a 300mm. or 400mm. lens. Indeed, all the way up the eastern side new groupings and different backgrounds emerge. If the wind is strong easterly or north-easterly (in which case you will be fortunate to have landed) the impressive gathering of non-breeding 'club' birds, some 2,000 + in all stages of immaturity, will be congregated on the edges of the colony or passing and re-passing, hanging in the wind. They always prefer the windward side of the rock because landing and taking off is safer. Nowadays the north-west slope is a snowfield of Gannets where once my hide stood. There is no finer sight than this vast gathering, seen from the summit. Somewhere in the middle a few of my colour-ringed birds still survive. The Bass gannetry is increasing steadily and now numbers more than 20,000 occupied sites; which is not quite the same thing as 20,000 pairs and certainly not the same as 20,000 nests or 20,000 breeding pairs!

The Bass Gannets are extraordinarily tame but even they will flee if approached too closely. Disturbed Gannets lose eggs and chicks, to other Gannets, which pilfer the nest-material, and to the ever-watchful Herring Gulls. Ordinary care will ensure that this does not happen.

The best times to visit the Bass are near the beginning of the breeding season in late April or early May, when display and nest-building are at their peak, or when the young are in the nest. For most species that means June or early July, but Fulmars and Gannets go on much longer. Gannets are still in full colonial cry in August and early September though, by then, many of the black juveniles will be on their way to North African waters.

It is rare, these despoiling days, to find a magnificent and much-visited spot not only unspoilt, untrammelled by rules and totally uncommercialised, but actually better than ever. Little more than a hundred years ago, the Bass Gannets, still to recover from the annual commercial killings, were shot from boats and from the rock for 'sport'. Now, thanks to its owner, Sir Hew Hamilton Dalrymple, the rock 'called the Bass' remains, as in Hector Boece's day, 'full of admiration and wonder, therein also is great store of Soland geese and nowhere else but in Ailsaie and this rocks'.

J. Bryan Nelson

*Dr Nelson has been studying the Gannets on the Bass for more than 30 years and is the author of a range of publications including The Gannet and Living with Seabirds. Fred Marr is the Bass boatman and can be contacted on North Berwick 2838.*



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# SOC News

## A Day in Glasgow

The joint SOC/BTO one day conference is now an established feature of the 'spring' - though anyone driving through sleet and snow to reach Glasgow on March 7th would appreciate that, in Scotland, spring comes well after the equinox. Weather apart, the day went well and the 150 participants enjoyed a varied programme of talks with the specimens in the Hunterian Museum, and the marine life in the tanks in the Zoology Department, providing an intriguing background.

### Avian Invaders

Raymond O'Connor started the proceedings with a thought provoking talk on the biological features common to successful colonizers. Some generally accepted ideas don't stand up to critical examination as our invaders don't all come from the same post glacial refuge nor are many of them long distance migrants. Comparisons between Britain and Iceland are instructive and Raymond discussed the failure of so many species to make it across the Irish Sea in detail (though St Patrick wasn't mentioned presumably as he dealt with snakes rather than birds). Successful colonizers tend to have a source population nearby and a high reproductive rate spread over several small clutches rather than one large one. Even when the birds are deliberately introduced many attempts fail - cf Little Owl and Red-legged Partridge. This is true elsewhere in the world, a point often forgotten due to the spectacular success of a few species such as Starlings and House Sparrows. Raymond's analyses owed much to the work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel but he also pointed out that more detailed ecological work is needed to understand why particular species colonize at certain times.

### Siskins and Blue Tits

Malcolm Chesney then described some results from ringing Siskins in his garden. Peak numbers occur in April as birds move north through Scone towards the Highlands. Attempts to interpret the birds' weights have been frustrating, probably due to the effect of liberal supplies of peanuts!

Neil McCulloch followed with data from Dundee University's studies of Blue Tits, set up to elucidate how genetic factors operate within the population.

### The Clyde Atlas Project

Tetrads (2x2km squares) are often thought more appropriate in the South, where more observers are available, but

they do give a much better picture of the distribution of species within a region than bigger squares. In the inner Clyde area Ian Gibson and his colleagues are building up a useful data bank which is already producing useful information; Kingfishers are as numerous as in parts of England while Buzzard distribution points to continued illegal persecution.

### Dispersing Dippers

This species has been in the news largely due to the effect of acidification on its food supply in Wales and SW Scotland. Some populations are still very healthy, including Steve Newton's near Stirling, where he has been looking at juvenile dispersal and how the young birds fare in dominance disputes. It seems that the colour of the underparts, which is often very variable, but richer in males than in females and in older birds than youngsters, is important in Dipper communication.

### Long lived Eiders

Stephen Baillie returned to Scotland to discuss Eiders, especially those breeding on the Sands of Forrie. Few Eider eggs turn into adult birds but, with an adult mortality of under 10% (comparable to seabirds rather than other ducks), the population can cope. Unusually, first year birds stay near the colony in winter whereas older birds go further, often to the Firths of Tay and Forth. This suggests that birds 'learn' about good wintering sites by joining older birds in the moult period. Males move further than females and a few have reached the Baltic.

### Water Birds

After tea Steve Carter looked at the diet of Goosanders, which some members are counting this spring. Although they do eat salmon and trout there is no convincing evidence that this has a significant effect on the numbers of fish of a size to interest the angler. Greg Mudge rounded off the day by describing the problems that affect one of our rarest breeding birds, the Black-throated Diver. Far too many pairs fail to breed successfully and fluctuating water levels, predation and disturbance are all implicated.

SdP

## Broadening horizons at the Borders Branch

Arriving late at a recent branch meeting one of the regular members found the usual room already in use for another function. At the second function room he found the slide-show already begun, complete with overhead projector as ex-

pected. He slipped into the darkened room and found a vacant seat, settling down to enjoy Andy Webb's "Seabirds at Sea" lecture.

Imagine his horror on realising that the sequence of slides showed close-up details of abdominal surgery and not a seabird in sight! (Obviously not a Bernie Zonfrillo lecture!) Too embarrassed by this stage to retreat he sat through the entire presentation and nipped out smartly when the lights came on and the rest of the post-graduate medical audience turned to eye him with suspicion.

Who says that SOC members are too narrow in their interests!

Malcolm Ross

## Glasgow Jubilee Lecture

Over 150 people turned up at Kelvingrove for Tom Weir's talk "Scotland's Wildlife and Scenery." We were treated to a splendid evening's entertainment as Tom presented over two hundred slides, including a strong wildlife content. Amongst his many fine bird slides, those of Golden Eagle, Gannets and Capercaillie were outstanding. The fascinating, often humorous dialogue was delivered with the polished ease of a professional broadcaster. A few initial gremlins in the PA system merely prompted him to a bit of rapid-fire humour which added to the convivial atmosphere in the hall. An encouraging proportion of the audience stayed behind to have a glass or two of wine and mingle with the local ornithologists. It is a bit doubtful whether our aim of attracting new members was realised, but there were certainly a few people expressing interest in the SOC.

Our other aim, to raise some funds for the branch, was a more obvious success, with some £221 being cleared on the night. This will be a great contribution towards the printing of the bulletin and branch projects such as the Tetrad Atlas.

JJS

## Ian Lyster

The tragic and untimely death of Ian Lyster in April, after a long illness, is a sad blow to the Club and to the RSPB in Scotland, both of which he served so well. Ian was so often there, behind the scenes with help and practical advice and always willing to join in whenever volunteers were needed. He revitalised the bird room at the Royal Scottish Museum and did much to restore the traditional relationship between field and museum workers in Scotland. Above all, perhaps, we shall miss his cheerful company and his finely-tuned sense of humour: in the museum or in the field, he was the ideal companion. Our deepest sympathy goes to his widow, Margaret and their two sons.

Mike Everett

# Surveys and Research Committee

Several changes have occurred in this committee's membership and title. Chairman Iain Taylor has resigned due to pressure of other work as have Tony Colling, Hector Galbraith, Derek Langslow and John Love. The Club is grateful to them all for their contributions and to Roy Dennis and Mick Marquiss who are staying on to provide continuity. Joining the committee, which will be chaired by Stan da Prato, are Allan Brown, Ian Gibson and Mike Pienkowski.

The change in title reflects the feeling, both in the committee and the club as a whole, that the word research on its own suggests something rather too high powered for what is essentially a club and not a scientific institution. By adding the word surveys we are stressing the valuable role members can play in describing the numbers and distribution of birds in Scotland, which is what the S.O.C. is really all about.

Scotland is, of course, part of a bigger island group and we shall continue to co-operate in national surveys run by bodies such as the B.T.O. and the Wildfowl Trust. This means that for the next few years specifically Scottish projects are unlikely to be launched, since short winter days are already taken up by wildfowl and wader counts, while the breeding seasons from 1988-1990 will be devoted to the new Atlas. The S.O.C. plans to run the Scottish end of this project and we hope to have an organizer working from 21 Regent Terrace. Unlike its predecessor the new breeding Atlas will be quantitative. This means that pilot work is taking place this year to test appropriate census methods; however it seems safe to say that tetrad work in progress in Clyde and planned for Lothian should fit in well with the national project.

SdP

# Photo spot



*This superb photograph of a Barn Owl with prey (and fly!) was taken by Brian Turner. May we remind readers that entries for this year's Photographic Competition must be sent to SOC (Photo Comp), 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT by the end of August.*

## HIGHLAND FIELD STUDIES

Exploring Morvern  
Mountain Flowers  
Sedges and Rushes  
Wildflowers of Tayside  
Natural History Photography  
Exploring the Highlands  
Exploring Tayside  
Bryophytes  
Natural History of Skye  
Birds of Morvern  
Autumn in Tayside  
Birds of Autumn

Ardtornish, Argyll  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Abriachan, Inverness-shire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Harlosh, Skye  
Ardtornish, Argyll  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire

May 30-June 6  
June 27-July 4  
July 11-18  
July 18-25  
August 1-8  
August 15-22  
August 22-29  
September 11-18  
Oct 3-10  
Oct 10-17  
Oct 17-24  
Oct 23-25

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Further details of these and the full programme available (s.a.e. please) from:

BRIAN S BROOKES MBE MSc. Highland Field Studies, Smithy Cottage, Sneigow, Dunkeld, Perthshire, PH8 ORD. Telephone: Ceputh (073871) 374.





## Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc.

There are no day-trippers, no caravanners, etc., but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hôte cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating and private facilities). Drive on-off car and passenger ferry ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Dinner, accommodation and breakfast from £25.00 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three luxury self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £55.00 weekly. Also special demi-pension arrangements for Field Study parties from £7.75 daily. Details on request.

### THE HOTEL, ISLE OF COLONSAY, ARGYLL

(Kevin and Christa Byrne)

Telephone: Colonsay (09512) 316 – open all year

N.B. Booklet @ £3.50 inc. p&p describes the island's birds – 66pp plus 8pp colour photos.

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## Reviews

**Fraser Darling's Islands** by John Morton Boyd; Edinburgh University Press; 1986; 254 pp; many plates, maps and diagrams; £12.95.

**Living with Seabirds** by Bryan Nelson; Edinburgh University Press; 1986; 254 pp; many plates, maps and diagrams; £12.95.

This new Edinburgh series aims to give accounts of scientific work within a biological frame-work, similar to the writings of that pioneer of the ecological and environment movement, Frank Fraser Darling. It also taps the rich field of biological research that uses islands as natural laboratories, starting with Scottish islands and extending to all parts of the world. The inaugural volume is a biography of Frank Fraser Darling. Morton Boyd tells the story of Frank Fraser Darling's Highland and Island years and gives a very personal portrait of this great twentieth century Scottish naturalist.

The second volume is *Living with Seabirds* by the world expert on gannets and boobies, Bryan Nelson. Never far from the pages of Bryan Nelson's book are these and other seabirds. It begins atop the Bass Rock, moves to the Galapagos and then to Christmas Island. Both books are excellently written and should be in the library of every Scottish ornithologist.

John C. Davies

**The Mute Swan** by Mike Birkhead and Christopher Perrins; Christopher Helm; 1986; 57 pages; 25 black and white plates; 26 line drawings; £13.95.

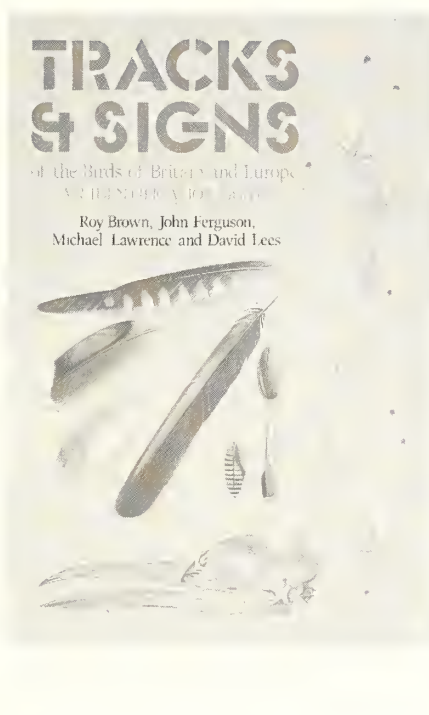
This is the first monograph on the Mute Swan for 30 years. During that time much work has been done on its population dynamics and ecology, especially in England. This book is an excellent summary of recent research in a clear and readable format. The text is interspersed with attractive line drawings and covers history and customs, as well as the biology and ecology of the Mute Swan.

Inevitably the book concentrates on the lead poisoning controversy - a predominantly English phenomenon - which is now being alleviated, partly through the effort of the authors. The book concludes with a look to the future and the prospects for swans in the light of habitat changes, loss of nest sites, increasing boat traffic, etc. This is a thoroughly recommended work - and not just for those obsessed with swans! Perhaps it may stimulate more detailed studies in Scotland where evidence from the East Scotland Mute Swan study suggests a more mobile population than is the case with their English cousins.

Allan W. Brown

**Tracks and Signs of the Birds of Britain and Europe: An Identification Guide** by Roy Brown, John Ferguson, Michael Lawrence and David Lees; Christopher Helm; 1987; 232pp; 47 colour plates, many b & w illustrations; £17.95.

Many birdwatchers and ornithologists may dismiss this book as peripheral to their interest but I would argue the identification of tracks and signs as every bit as satisfying and informative as identifying live birds. It requires



skill which until now had to be learned almost entirely from personal experience because previous guides have concentrated on mammal signs. This book gives a very good introduction to fieldcraft techniques following on with chapters on tracks, nests and roosts, feeding and behavioural signs, pellets, droppings, feathers and skulls. Sufficient species are included to enable the identification of most items commonly found in Britain. In particular, the larger feathers of over 200 species are described and most of them accurately illustrated in colour. This alone makes the book outstanding, but might also create problems for bird recorders. Some years ago I found the feather of a European Roller in the Forest of Ae, Dumfries-shire; a difficult record because it was equally likely to have dropped from some foreign tourists' hat as from the Roller itself. Though not cheap, I strongly recommend this book to anyone prepared to use it properly for it will add a new and rewarding dimension to fieldwork.

Mick Marquiss

**Collins Guide to the Birds of Prey of Britain and Europe, North Africa and the Middle East** by Benny Gensbol; Collins; 1986; 384pp; over 180 photos; 42 maps & charts; 300 drawings; £14.95.

This book covers the 46 birds of prey recorded as breeding in Britain and Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. It covers breeding, distribution, population trends, feeding, habitat and foraging methods as well as migration of all western palearctic raptors. Benny Gensbol has done a fine job bringing together a mass of data and compressing it neatly into this pocket-sized book. Its finest and most useful feature is its country by country population tables which show at a glance the fortunes of each of the individual species, using much modern day data (eg 1981 British Peregrine survey and the Eagle survey of 1982). I can only presume that the data from other countries is as concise and up to date as Britain. There is a section on flight identification with excellent illustrations by Bjarne

Bertel. This rivals "Flight Identification of European Raptors" by RF Porter et al, showing all species in great detail and from all angles in various stages of moult, age and colour variations. There is little previously unknown information here but to have it all gathered together in one book is very useful indeed and at nearly 400 pages £14.95 is good value.

Iain C. MacLeod

**The Birds of Israel** by Uzi Paz; Christopher Helm; 1987; 264 pages; 60 colour photos; 29 line drawings; £19.95.

Israel in this book includes the occupied West Bank of Jordan and Golan Heights and there are numerous references to formerly occupied Sinai. It is not a field guide but more the Israeli equivalent of *Birds in Scotland*. The meat is in the detailed systematic list which gives brief descriptions of each species and its world range as well as details of status, distribution, habits, habitat and where appropriate breeding biology in Israel. The text is authoritative and contains much information which is not available elsewhere. There is an extensive ringing programme in Israel and good use is made of the data to indicate the origins and destinations of many birds seen in the country. The photographs seem to have been randomly chosen but they are well-reproduced and some are quite superb. The captions for those of Eagle Owl and Little Owl have been transposed. My one disappointment is that no attempt has been made to show any information visually by use of distribution maps. Nevertheless this is a welcome addition to the literature and essential reading for all those interested in the birds of the Middle East.

Alan Brown

**Twentieth Century Wildlife Artists** by Nicholas Hammond; Christopher Helm; 1986; 224pp; many colour and black & white plates; £30.

A sumptuous volume featuring the work of many artists representative of twentieth century wildlife art. The first part of the book contains four brief chapters - 'Wildlife and Art', 'The Background to Today's Wildlife Art', 'Wildlife Painting in the Twentieth Century' and 'Illustrations for Identification'. The second part features essays on forty-three artists recounting their lives and working methods richly illustrated with examples of their work. Superbly reproduced illustrations range from the gargantuan canvases of the grand doyen of wildlife art, Bruno Liljefors, through various print mediums to the contemporary, masterful watercolours of Lars Jonsson. Birds predominate and most are well depicted in their environment. The rich variety of styles will have something to dip into time and time again.

The inclusion of picture dimensions and medium would have been useful, the latter is not always obvious. Also I feel that the equivalent of eighteen blank pages could have been better employed with further illustrations. Much of the American work has already been published in recent art books; it would have been nice to have shown some new paintings.

This is a book to treasure and one that no wildlife art lover should be without. It will do much for the wider appreciation of wildlife art as a genre.

Keith Brockie



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## Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 July for the September number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries - and suggestions - will be welcomed by the Editor. Information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in SB 14(1).

## SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:  
 Adult ..... £10.00  
 Junior (under 18 or student under 25) £4.00  
 Family (husband, wife & children under 18) ..... £14.50  
 Life, individual £200.00, family £300.00  
 Pensioner, individual £6.00, family £8.50  
 Further details from Membership Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

## SOC Notices

### Jubilee Appeal Fund

There was a magnificent response to the President's Golden Jubilee Appeal letter sent to members last February. Over £6,000 was donated by individual members and the Fund now stands at over £10,000. Several branches have also made generous contributions towards the Appeal. Council hasn't yet decided how the money is to be spent, but it will probably be divided between support of ornithological field work and research in Scotland and the repairs and maintenance of the Club's headquarters at 21 Regent Terrace.

### Annual Conference and AGM

This year's Conference and AGM will be held in the Pollock Halls, University of Edinburgh during the weekend 11th-13th September. The conference theme is 'Scottish Farming and Birds'. Details of the conference programme, booking form and AGM agenda are enclosed with this issue of *SBN*.

### New Honorary Member

Bill Harper, the Club's Librarian since 1977 and Honorary Treasurer from 1980-86, has been made an honorary member by Council in recognition of his services to the Club and Scottish Ornithology.

### New Bookshop Manager

Moir Rix has been appointed as the new manager of the Bird Bookshop. Moira's family home is in the Borders, and she took a degree in Biology at Stirling University. She has six years bookselling experience with James Thin, the Edinburgh booksellers, and as Scottish manager of Alan Armstrong & Associates, a specialist library and technical booksellers. We wish Moira all the best in her new job which she started at the end of May.

### Photographic Competition

Entrants should note that this year's deadline is earlier as the Annual Conference has moved to September. Please have your entries to 21 Regent Terrace by the end of August. Prizes are up this year: First gets £20, second £15 and third £10 vouchers for the Club Bookshop.

### Keith Brockie Print

This limited edition print of a magnificent Golden Eagle in Caenlochan is selling fast. Produced especially for the Club's Golden Jubilee by Keith Brockie, one of our foremost wildlife artists, the print is in full colour on fine art paper and measures 19" x 15" overall. Keith is well known as an artist and author of *Wildlife Sketchbook* and *One Man's Island*, and his superb drawings illustrate many bird books. Proceeds from the sale of the print go to the Jubilee Appeal Fund. This is a wonderful opportunity to acquire a superb example of Keith's work at a very reasonable price and benefit the Club as well. The print is strictly limited to 250 copies, costs £20 (including postage & packing) and is only available from the SOC.

### SOC Checklist and Fieldlist

Two new SOC publications are now available - a checklist and fieldlist of Scottish Birds compiled by Valerie Thom. The Checklist is an annotated list of all species reliably recorded in the wild in Scotland this century. The Fieldlist is a 'tick list' including all species which occurred in Scotland annually, and on average at least four times a year, in 1981-85. The Checklist is A5 size, 32 pages and costs 95p, the Fieldlist is A6, 8 pages and 50p; both are available from The Bird Bookshop, post free to members.

### Local Bird Reports and Avifaunas

We hope to include a section listing these in a future issue to encourage sales of what are rarely big money spinners. This service will be free, as are entries to the Bookshop Catalogue, provided the following conditions are met: brief details only (area covered, price including post and packing, contact address) plus the publication must be linked to an SOC branch. Individual, commercial ventures should advertise in the normal way. Authors and editors should contact the Business Editor, SBN, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh.

### Old Scottish Birds

We have run out of the first issue of the new *Scottish Birds*, 14 (1), June 1986. If you have a copy you don't want please send it to Bill Harper, the Librarian.

## Small ads

**SPEY VALLEY.** 5 well equipped self catering holiday cottages conveniently situated in picturesque rural surroundings close to the Insh Marshes, a Nature Reserve managed by the R.S.P.B., and only a short drive from the Cairngorms and Loch Garten (Ospreys). Abundant wildlife all around with good hill walking. For further details and brochure send S.A.E. to: Alvie Estate, Kincaig, Kingussie, Inverness-shire or tel. Kincaig (054 04) 255.

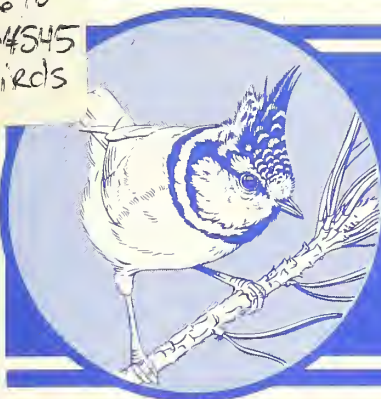
**STRONESLANEY, STRATHYRE.** Self catering. Watch river and marsh birds from your log-cabin window or come B & B in farmhouse. Beautiful forest, loch and mountain surroundings. Tel: 08774 676.

**HIGHLAND COTTAGES.** Self-catering, traditional cottages. Isle of Skye and Perthshire. Excellent for bird-watching. Enquiries to: Smithy Cottage, Snaigow, Dunkeld, Perthshire PH8 ORD. Telephone: Caputh (073871) 374.

**FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY REPORT** for 1986 now available at £2.50 per copy from FIBOT, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

**GALLOWAY BIRD REPORT 1985.** Compiled by Donald Watson (covers Kirkcudbrightshire & Wigtownshire). £1.65 (inc. p&p) from: Miss J.E. Howie, 60 Main Street, St John's Town of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3UW.

**BIRD JOURNAL** back numbers supplied. — D. Morgan, Whitmore, Umberleigh, Devon.



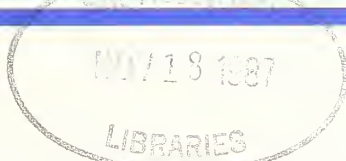
THE SCOTTISH  
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

# Scottish Bird News

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ISSN 0268-3199

No. 7

Edited by Stanley da Prato  
Assisted by John Davies



## Poisoned

The killing of raptors by the illegal use of poisons was covered in our March issue. The fact we are returning to the topic so soon demonstrates that the problem is not decreasing. The RSPB's Investigations Department in Scotland has followed up 17 confirmed cases this year involving the deaths of, amongst others, six Buzzards and two Golden Eagles.

The most commonly used poison is the rodenticide Alphachloralose, a narcotic which, when ingested, causes thermal shock and death from acute hypothermia. A breakdown of incidents for the last 12 years in Scotland shows that 50% of all incidents involved this poison. Mevinphos, sold under the brand name of Phosdrin, accounted for 31% of incidents in the same period. The only legal use for this deadly organophosphorous compound is as a pesticide on soft fruit, in highly diluted form. Undiluted this substance is so toxic that only a couple of drops could kill a man. Strychnine is occasionally found but the tight controls on its use have resulted in far fewer incidents in recent years. Having said that, a Buzzard died in Wigtownshire this year after ingesting this poison.

In February a new substance was added to the Scottish list - Fenthion - another organophosphate. We had received reports of the deaths of a large number of Rooks at a rookery at East Fortune, East Lothian. We visited the area and found several dead and dying birds. We suspected agricultural misuse and informed the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland. They made further investigations and interviewed farmers, but all remained tight-lipped. An analysis of corpses at DAFS' Chemistry Section at East Craigs in Edinburgh revealed Fenthion. This chemical has one legal use, as a guard against warble fly in sheep dips. In this case grain had been impregnated with high dosages, an obvious deliberate misuse. We discovered that last summer two Red Kites were killed in central Wales after feeding on sheep carrion; the sheep had been dipped with too high a concentration of the same substance.

In April came perhaps the most serious incident of the year. A hill-walker found a deer carcass lying on a hillside in an Inverness-shire glen. Next to the carcass were two dead Golden Eagles.



Seven dead Buzzards with poisoned Rabbit

R.S.P.B.

Both eagles were ringed, and these rings were removed by the walker before he left the locality. Unfortunately there was a delay of a couple of days before this information was passed to RSPB staff and by the time the area was visited, the deer and the eagles were gone. At the scene, a small amount of white powder was found and uplifted for analysis at East Craigs. It was no real surprise that the powder was Alphachloralose. A police search of the local gamekeeper's house revealed no further evidence.

In May a visit was made to an estate to the north of Crieff in Perthshire. Reports suggested that all the local Buzzards had vanished and poison was suspected. RSPB staff found a dead Rook; close by was a split-open rabbit. Two eggs were found laid out in a rocky clearing in a wood; one egg was surrounded by dead flies, bluebottles and beetles, a sure sign of poison. Later analysis showed large residues of Mevinphos in the egg and in the Rook. A week later two Lesser Black-backed Gulls were found nearby, also containing Mevinphos. The local police were informed, and the incident investigated. A suspect was interviewed, but no proof of guilt found. These are details of just three incidents this year. We have also had a

Mevinphos Buzzard from Islay, an Alphachloralose crow from Arran, two Alphachloralose Buzzards from Wigtownshire and Alphachloralose injected eggs from Ayrshire and Morayshire.

The misuse of poison not only accounts for wildlife but also a large number of domestic pets. Between 1975 and 1986 a total of 57 cats and 94 dogs were poisoned in Scotland. The RSPB, working closely with DAFS and the police, are endeavouring to pursue all poison cases to bring about an end to this appalling death toll. Unfortunately proof is difficult to come by and in a court of law the words "beyond all reasonable doubt" mean just that.

The recent increased public awareness of this sort of poisoning has led to the stopping of this action on many estates, and on several occasions police involvement, and any sort of publicity will act as a deterrent. If you have any information concerning the misuse of poisons please contact the RSPB Investigations Section at 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BN or contact (031) 556-5624 or (031) 557-3136.

## Ups and downs in 87

The weather in the 1987 breeding season flattered to deceive, with a warmer than average spell in late April followed by wetter and cooler than average conditions in May and June in most of Scotland. How did our breeding birds fare? Census workers' preliminary results indicate considerable variation with some species and parts of the country doing quite well and others having a poor season.

### Floods and spates

Very wet weather can hit breeding birds directly if their nests are flooded or their eggs or chicks chilled. This certainly happened in some areas with reports of Dipper and wader nests washed out. However it was not the whole story and several correspondents report waders bringing off good numbers of young even in upland areas where snow was lying in May. Other factors have been affecting ground nesting birds besides weather. More farmers now sow oil seed rape or winter wheat, which means that ground that was once bare in early spring is now covered by young growth. This does not suit birds that like to be able to scan their surroundings for predators and, along with continued drainage of the damper fields that are so important to wader chicks, means that even common species like Lapwings are becoming scarcer on many farms. Partridges seem to have suffered in many places but Red Grouse did well and Corncrakes were reported from sites outwith their Hebridean stronghold. Dipper success was uneven and stream acidity continues to affect these birds in Galloway.

Ducks were late in breeding on Loch Leven and sawbills were down in several areas but Eiders were at record levels on some Forth islands. Coot and Moorhen did well in several localities. Mink were again mentioned as affecting aquatic birds including a worrying report about divers on Arran.

### Abundant rodents

It is encouraging to hear reports of Golden Eagles and Peregrines doing well in several areas and Hen Harriers rearing young in a part of South Scotland where persecution has prevented this in the past. Sparrowhawks continue to do well in the Lothians where observers now comment that they may be commoner than Kestrels. Owls had a good year, especially in the South West, where high vole numbers meant that Barn Owls reared many chicks in what is now their Scottish stronghold.



Nightjar feeding nestling



Magpie  
Andrew Dowell

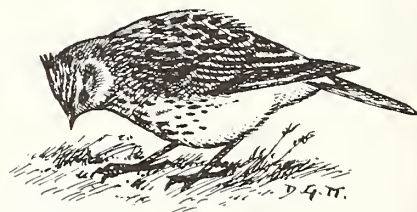
### Events at sea

Seabirds were another group with mixed fortunes in 1987. On Canna breeding started earlier than last year but Kittiwakes had poor success. In Shetland terns and Kittiwakes, both of which feed at the sea surface, did badly; deeper diving species such as auks fared better though some of Fair Isle's Tysties were washed out by a heavy swell. This again raises the question of over-fishing, especially large scale catching of Sand Eels for fish meal. In the Forth tern numbers were up with a particularly encouraging report of Roseates up to 20 pairs on Inchmickery, though breeding success was poor at Aberlady and the Isle of May. Also on the May Kittiwakes, Shags and Puffins were at record levels but, for the first time, Guillemot numbers on monitoring plots decreased. The first egg dates for Shags were c.7 weeks earlier than last year and most species had good breeding success. Gannets continue to prosper though the spell of weather that nearly washed out the Open Golf Championship at nearby Muirfield seems to have killed a number of Gannet chicks whose bodies still litter the East Lothian coast.

### Residents revival

Some passerines thrived in the damp conditions. Blackbirds reared extra broods to take advantage of the availability of earthworms, though the number of territories of Blackbird and Song Thrush was down on several C.B.C. plots. One group that is certainly doing well is the corvids with expansion of both Magpies, and now Jays, occurring in the Lothians. In general residents seem to have come through the winter well and many people report increases in Treecreepers, Wren, Tits and Goldcrests, all of which were affected by the cold winter of 1985-86. There were some exceptions such as inexplicable declines in Dunnocks in East Lothian and Ayrshire. Skylarks were also reported down, though not uniformly; changing farm practices may also affect them. Grey Wagtails declined on the Tweed though this may be a local effect due to river pollution.

Increases in cardueline finches such as Linnets are welcome as this group has shown a nationwide decline as modern agriculture gets rids of weeds. Even so, seed eater numbers remain low and some species, such as Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting, continue on a downward trend. Redpolls are still below their 1970's peak but Siskin bred for the first time on record in East Lothian.



Skylark  
David G. Mitchell

### More rain in Africa

Reports of better conditions in the Sahel were followed by increases in Whitethroats, Sedge Warblers, Sand Martins and Redstarts. Not all long distance migrants winter in the zone immediately south of the Sahara. Some, such as Lesser Whitethroat and Wood Warbler, were reported in good numbers but there were yet more reports of declines in House Martins. This is a particularly easy species to census when it breeds on buildings and well worth more attention. It is disappointing to hear Nightjars were down yet again in Arran and that there have been problems with the Forestry Commission over their habitat.

**THANKS** to James Brown, Martin Cook, Andy Dowell, Roger Durman, Mr. and Mrs. Colin Edwards, Fair Isle Bird Observatory (Nick Riddiford and K. Osborn), Peter Gordon, Mike Harris, Bryan Hickman, Alex. Joss, P.J. Knowling, Ian Langford, Neil McCulloch, Donnie Macdonald, Fiona McIntyre, Ian Poxton, John Rhead, Mr. and Mrs. D. Robertson, Malcolm Ross, RSPB Scotland (Alan Coles, Dave Dick, John Hunt and Iain MacLeod), Geoff Shaw, Marion and Stan Shimeld, Ian Stenhouse, Bob Swann, Sarah Wanless and Derrick Warner.

Stan da Prato

E.C. Fellowes

## Recent Reports

*These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record, nor will they be indexed. Please send reports to Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland, via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period April to June is covered here.*

Spring passage began exceptionally early with south-east winds in late April. This early promise was not fulfilled and through most of May the winds remained north-westerly resulting in Fair Isle's worst spring for years. This weather did bring a few surprises in the form of American birds, with a **White-throated Sparrow** in Shetland adding credibility to the splendid male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** which arrived at the same time. Easterlies returned at the end of May bringing a few more goodies including, strangely enough, another **White-throated Sparrow**.

**Great Northern Divers** reached a peak of 43 in Quendale Bay, Shetland on 28th April whilst one was seen inland at Loch Garten. Single **White-billed Divers** were off Papa Westray and Peterhead. **Red-necked Grebe** returned to Gosford Bay by 10th June. Small numbers of blue **Fulmars** were noted off Peterhead and Shetland. A **Sooty Shearwater** was off North Ronaldsay on 26th May. An unprecedented influx of **Night Herons** into Britain in late April and early May brought at least 3 to Shetland, one to St. Abbs and another to Drem. A **Purple Heron** visited Shetland in April.



King Eider  
Angus Hogg

A series of records of **Snow Geese** in Grampian brought singles to 4 sites and 2 blue phase birds to the Ythan. Two **Ruddy Shelduck** at Lossiemouth in April were presumably of captive origin. A drake **American Wigeon** was on Orkney and a **Green-winged Teal** on Shetland. Shetland had at least 3 drake **King Eiders**, whilst another was seen off Peterhead and later on the Ythan. The Bressay **Surf Scoter** stayed well into May as did the Orkney **Smew**. A drake **Ruddy Duck** appeared in Shetland.

A **Honey Buzzard** on Papa Westray on 29th April was amongst a number of very early migrants recorded at that time. Angus Hogg managed to add **Red Kite** to his Scottish list at Maybole on 20th May. Fair Isle had a male **Lesser Kestrel** on 23rd June and Orkney a **Saker** in April. A **Spotted Crane** was on Fair Isle where there was also a **Corncrake**, but only 2 of the latter were reported calling in Shetland, whilst another was at Kirkwall. **Cranes** appeared in Shetland and on Fair Isle with 2 in Orkney and 2 more at Reston.

A **Stone Curlew** appeared at Glen Ferness, Morayshire in June. **Avocets** were at Barns Ness and Aberlady. A **Pratincole** on Unst on 25th May avoided specific identification. Fair Isle had a very early **Little Stint** on 5 May, whilst 2 **Temminck's Stints** were on Unst in late May and another at Musselburgh in June.

A **Curlew Sandpiper** was in Orkney in mid-June. A **Broad-billed Sandpiper** was an unexpected sighting on a beached bird survey in Shetland in late-May. A **Terek Sandpiper** appeared at Tankerness, Orkney on 5th June. The first **Red-necked Phalarope** arrived on Fetlar on 22nd May. **Pomarine Skuas** appeared in good numbers off the Western Isles and also in Shetland as did **Long-tailed Skuas**. Following a north-westerly, 53 were seen off Wats Ness. A **Ring-billed Gull** was at Hillwell in Shetland. **Iceland and Glaucous Gulls** were scarce. Fair Isle was overflown by a **Caspian Tern** on 29th May. Two **Black Terns** were at Ayr and a **White-winged Black Tern** was at Meikle Loch on 23rd May. A **Little Auk** off Unst on 20th April was rather late. **Turtle Doves** were widely scattered. North Ronaldsay had a **Snowy Owl** on 1st April whilst at least 2 remain in Shetland. **Hoopoes** appeared in Shetland, Orkney and St. Abbs but **Wrynecks** were scarce.

Single **Short-toed Larks** were on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay in May. **Shore Larks** appeared on Noss, Fair Isle and Aberlady. A **House Martin** on Fair Isle on 19th April was the earliest ever. Fair Isle produced a **Tawny Pipit** in early May and at Doonfoot **Meadow Pipit** passage averaged 1500/hour on 5th and 6th April with a peak of 4000/hour on 6th. Scattered records of **Yellow Wagtails** included both the blue and grey-headed races. Four pairs of **Yellow Wagtails** bred in Lothian with at least 1 female a grey-headed. Flocks of **Waxwings** numbered 19 in Forres, 50 in Elgin and 10 in Edinburgh all in April.

A **Nightingale** was on Shetland by 26th April, but a **Nightingale sp** at Aberlady in May eluded specific identification. **Bluethroats** were scarce, but an influx of **Black Redstarts** brought several to Shetland and at least 4 to Orkney, with others at Rattray, Newtonhill and at least 9 in Lothians/Borders. **Wheatears** peaked on Fair Isle with 175 on 28th April.



Black-browed Albatross  
M. Anderson

Fair Isle had its earliest ever **Sedge Warbler** on 19th April, but only one **Marsh Warbler** with the only other report from North Ronaldsay. A **Great Reed Warbler** was on Papa Westray on 29th April and another near Lerwick on 15th June. Fair Isle recorded 3 male **Subalpine Warblers** between 28th April and 25th May and another was at Rattray on 28th. A **Greenish Warbler** was on Fair Isle on 26th June. A male **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was in Shetland, whilst 2 females were seen in Orkney and another at St. Abbs. Two **Great Tits** on Fair Isle were the first for 5 years, whilst a **Nuthatch** at St. Abbs during April eluded most people's Scottish lists. Shetland had at least 4 **Golden Orioles** including 2 adult males but only small numbers of **Red-backed Shrikes** were reported. The only report of a **Great Grey Shrike** was from Speyside in April. Great excitement was caused in the Northern Isles by the appearance of 3 **Maggies** in Orkney and one on Fair Isle. An adult **Rose-coloured Starling** was sighted at Dufftown in June.



Rose-coloured Starling  
S.M.D. Alexander

**Arctic Redpolls** were reported on Whalsay and Foula. There were good numbers of **Scarlet Rosefinches** in the Northern Isles, also several large, bright, northern **Bullfinches**. Single **Hawfinches** occurred at 4 sites in Shetland from 3rd May to 8th June and another was on Sanday on 16th April. A **White-throated Sparrow** was at a bird table on Unst from 13th to 15th May and remarkably another spent a few hours at Kergord, Shetland on 16th June. Fair Isle had 2 **Ortolan Buntings** on 30th May and another was on Papa Westray in June. A **Rustic Bunting** reached Quendale, whilst Fair Isle had 3 and others were seen on Tiree and at Skateraw. A male **Yellow-breasted Bunting** was on South Ronaldsay on 25th April. The male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** which visited Unst and Yell from 12th to 24th May would undoubtedly have been considered an escape, had it not arrived at the same place on the same date as the first **White-throated Sparrow**.

### STOP PRESS

*At the time of writing the **Black-browed Albatross**, which has drawn countless bird-watchers to Hermaness during the last 17 summers, has not been seen for over two weeks. During all the years of its visits to this colony it has not been absent for more than one or two days at a time. Could this be the end of an era?*

Peter Ellis

## Editorial

### Reviewing our policies

This issue carries the Club Policy Review. Some may feel it is not radical enough or that it should have been done years ago as events have overtaken it as with publications which have already been modernised, thus this magazine. One lesson from *SBN* has been that if you feel some aspect of the SOC needs a shake up then go out and do it - our staff is tiny compared to BTO or SWT, never mind RSPB, and we cannot expect Regent Terrace to take all the initiatives. One thing that currently needs help is Guidelines for Branches to get the benefit of the questionnaires many of you completed last year.

### And asking the difficult questions

One section of the review that will cause comment is conservation - is the Club doing enough? Here your editor feels his job is to provide a forum for informed discussion of what the issues really are, since even the more responsible media tend to oversimplify anything into a Jobs v Birds battle. Some issues are clear cut such as the illegal use of poison baits. Others are much more complex. Not everyone will agree with Peter Hudson's views on managing large areas for sport, even if Golden Plovers and Merlins benefit as well as gamebirds, but we are happy to publish his article as it is based on good, scientific fieldwork. It is then up to you, the reader, to make your own value judgements on issues such as predator suppression.

The issue of managing uplands in Scotland is one that will continue to feature in *SBN*. Since the land in question was once largely covered in trees or scrub before people cut, burned and overgrazed it and since so many of the native large birds and mammals have been exterminated, we are dealing with a semi-natural landscape rather than "the last great European wilderness" to quote the sort of romantic nonsense "The Scotsman" likes to print in its Letters Page. We need to discuss the really difficult questions such as how many Greenshanks and Golden Eagles were there when the Caledonian Forest was at its best, how should conservationists respond if foresters offer to plant native tree species that will still cover the heather and is the White-tailed Eagle to be the only reintroduction to our depleted fauna?

### North-South divide?

We are happy to publicise the BTO's new National Centre but wonder whether SE England is really the best location - apparently many staff were reluctant to move from Tring but what happens in future when potential new staff are faced with sky high house prices? We also must express disappointment that the only response from the Nature Conservancy Council to our request to be on their mailing list was to send the Secretary an invitation to the launch of their Report on the effects of forestry in the North of Scotland - in London.

SdP

## New Breeding Atlas

The British Trust for Ornithology in association with the SOC and Irish Wildbird Conservancy is organising a new Atlas, fieldwork for which begins next year (1988). The SOC has made a commitment to appointing a Scottish organiser to ensure complete coverage of Scotland.

The first *Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* published in 1976 was a milestone in ornithological research and the baseline for the conservation of breeding birds in these islands. The new Atlas aims to map not only the distribution of breeding birds but also their density. Inevitably this will demand more fieldwork than the previous Atlas.

As before, the fieldwork will be carried out almost entirely by volunteers, mostly SOC members in Scotland. It is therefore essential if Scotland is to be adequately covered to have a full-time, paid organiser. This will provide not only the organisation but also the encouragement needed to get Club members, other birdwatchers and interested members of the public to take part in the project.

The SOC has funding, from the Endowment Funds, the Jubilee Appeal Fund and the Gillman Trust, to appoint a Scottish Atlas Organiser, initially for one year, 1988. Advertisements for the post will be placed this autumn in appropriate magazines and newspapers. Details of the job and application forms will be available from the Club Secretary.

This is an extremely exciting new venture for the SOC and ornithology in Scotland. Club members will be kept in touch with progress of the project and the ways in which they can participate through the quarterly mailings of *Scottish Bird News*.

John Davies

## A Wet Weekend in the West

Five hardy members of the St Andrews Branch spent their annual Highland weekend in Glen Garry, Inverness-shire, during the weekend 29-31st May. They didn't set out to be hardy but the almost incessant West Highland downpour soon toughened them! Arrival at the Tomdoun Hotel on the Friday evening gave a good foretaste of the typical sounds of the weekend: Redwings singing in the rain and Welshmen singing in the bar - in Welsh!

Despite the disappointing weather a total of 80 species was recorded, ranging from the typical Highland Whinchat, Redstart, Tree Pipit, Wood Warbler, Raven, Crossbill, Siskin and Redpoll to the slightly more exotic Black-throated Diver, breeding Dunlin and Golden Plover (the reward for climbing through horizontal rain), Greenshank and Stonechat (a rare sight nowadays for East-coasters). The highlights, however, apart from the Redwings, which were singing in several places, were the Common Scoters, displaying and calling on several of the lochs, and the 'Cuckoo lek': five Cuckoos sitting in a large circle in a field in front of the hotel, doing nothing in particular. The whole area is well worth another visit, preferably when the sun is shining!

Donald Stewart

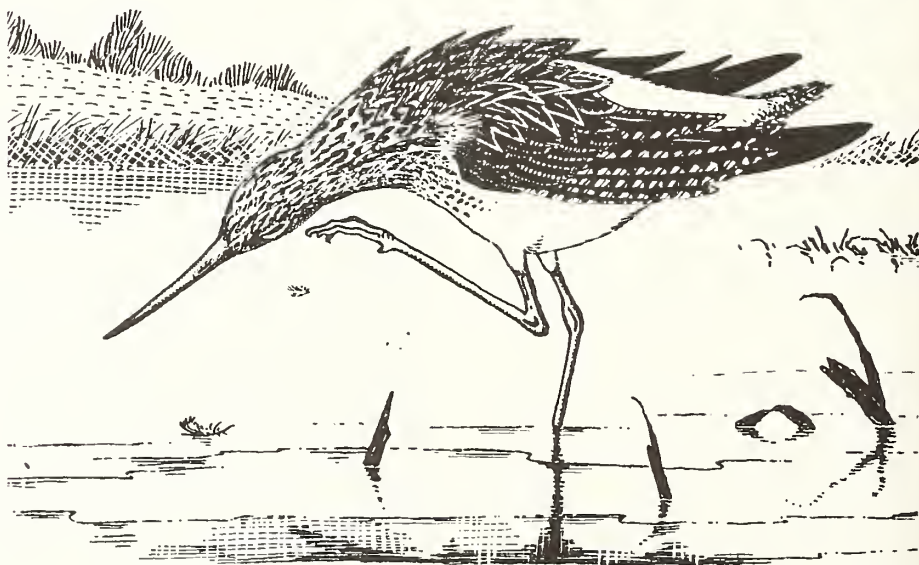
## Adult Entertainment

On Friday evening, April 3, at 6 p.m. the Tenafly Nature Center will hold a "Wood Cock Viewing."

In this program, participants will sit in silence and observe this bird's unusual mating display while sipping plum wine.

This program is for adults only.-  
Bergenfield (N.J.) Twin Boro News.

contributed by  
Prof and Mrs. Thomas



Greenshank

David G. Mitchell

# Club Policy Review

During Jubilee Year Council decided to take a look at all the Club's activities to see if there were ways in which it could be serving its members better and if there were any new directions it ought to take at the start of its second fifty years. All this was discussed at Council in June of last year followed by a larger meeting with representatives of many Branches in July. A summary of suggestions was then sent to Branches and discussed at members' nights and there was also a debate at the last AGM in November, so that there has been very widespread consultation with members. This is the central point of the whole exercise. The Club exists to provide the kind of facilities to help enable birdwatchers and ornithologists to enjoy their interest, and to provide a framework for the gathering of information which will benefit conservation and the birds themselves. Its membership is widely distributed, but overall it must be the kind of club its members want it to be.

All sorts of ideas about the Club have surfaced over the past year. Some of them did not get very far. There was no great enthusiasm for changing the name of the Club or its Crested Tit emblem in order to alter, and some thought enhance, its image. Tackling practical conservation work in the field was thought to be better left to other organisations, while of course members might wish to participate. The idea of a telephone grapevine got a stoney reception, though it is interesting to see that it is being tried in the south. There still seem to be mixed feelings about the optimum content of the Scottish Bird Report. But these are points of detail. What has clearly emerged from all this heart-searching is a Club in good heart with an important and necessary role to play among the wildlife organisations in Scotland, which is doing broadly the right kind of things but could do them even better.

The key to the Club's activities is the Branch. This is for the most part where members meet each other and which provides not only a social forum but a focal point for active birdwatching and projects extending into the Branch's own publications such as local Bird Reports. It is an area where enthusiasm and energy, especially among the younger members, can be tapped and given encouragement. Council has made a number of recommendations and decisions about Branches.

Over the last two years one thing which has loomed rather large in the minds of Council has been the necessary cost of refurbishing the Club's offices at 21 Regent Terrace. Fortunately we are now beginning to see our way towards the completion of this, but the work has imposed a considerable extra strain on the Secretary. Added to this has been the introduction of new office-systems for the Club and the Bookshop, including computers, and a rise in turnover of the Bookshop. This last has been of great value in helping to pay for the repairs, and the new systems will be of great benefit in the longer term, but they have both increased the burden in the short-term.

Drawing together the strands of the Policy Review within the terms of the Club's Constitution, Council has agreed on this statement of the Club's objectives many of which are, to a varying extent, already adopted throughout the Club.

## Aim

Summarising the objects of the Club in paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Club, all of which have full force, Council sees the aim of the Club as providing a forum for all birdwatchers and ornithologists in Scotland and encouraging the conservation of Scottish birds.

## Objectives

1. To provide congenial meeting places throughout Scotland for talks and the exchange of information among the diverse membership of the Club.

a) Branches are the main meeting places for members within the areas and with a wide distribution of the thirteen Branches from Thurso to Stranraer they cover most of the mainland. Council has decided that Branches shall adopt a name reflecting their area rather than the meeting place (as the Glasgow Branch has already done in taking the name Clyde) and have an open mind about holding their meetings in more than one place within the area in order to cater for changes in distribution of members. Wherever possible meetings should be held in comfortable and informal surroundings which encourage the opportunity for members to meet each other.

b) In order to make the widest use of the talents within Branches their committees and office-bearers shall have a rotating membership with a fixed term of three years for each office, renewable once, followed by at least one year out of that office. This follows the practice in Council committees. Each Branch committee shall have at least one member under the age of twenty five.

c) The main winter programme of meetings will continue with illustrated talks of about forty five minutes but including wherever possible other shorter items and informal discussion among members. Each Branch should continue to organise a programme of field outings throughout the year.

d) Where the Branch is large enough there should be regular meetings of a field-group of those members who are interested in active field work, and all of whom are welcome to join it. This group can be the focal point within the Branch for Club projects.

e) There will be occasional meetings of Branch representatives to exchange views and information.

2. To arrange conferences

a) The two day autumn conference will continue, providing a programme of talks on ornithological subjects and a congenial meeting place for members and for the Annual General Meeting.

b) The one day spring conference on current and recent field research, held in association with the BTO, has been a great success in its first three years, meeting in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow. This, too, will continue.

c) On suitable occasions, special conferences may be arranged.

3. To identify and promote fieldwork projects involving wide participation by members.

a) Many members welcome an opportunity to take part in surveys and projects which give purpose to their bird-watching and also benefit conservation in the widest sense. Some already carry out surveys organised by the Club, the BTO and others, but Council feels that this is an area where there is considerable scope for expansion amounting to a new development for the Club and which would include many members who have not so far taken part.

The Surveys and Research Committee will be making proposals for a continuing series of projects, but over the next three years the largest one will be the Scottish coverage of the new BTO Breeding Birds Atlas which this time will be making more detailed assessments of numbers. This is a huge and important undertaking which will give a lot of scope for participation. Through sponsorship and grant-aid Council hopes to employ a full-time organiser for the duration of the project.

b) Branches should also consider surveys and projects within their areas which could provide a useful supplement to their local Report and provide a further opportunity for participation by members.

4. To publish material relating to Scottish ornithology and to maintain an ornithological library

a) Major developments in the Club's regular publications have already taken place. Scottish Bird News and the new Scottish Birds, embodying the Scottish Bird Report, have got off to an excellent start and are still improving.

b) Following on from Birds in Scotland and other books Council will continue to support the publication of reports, check-lists and books of value to Scottish ornithology.

c) The Club will promote the publication of local bird reports covering, if possible, the whole of the country.

d) The Waterston Library will be maintained as a major ornithological collection.

5. To generate funds for the Club by running a bird bookshop and other means.

The Bird Bookshop provides an excellent service and its turnover has contributed substantially to the revenue of the Club. It has not yet reached the stage where the cost of removing it to a separate location would be justified but this may occur in the future. It is currently being equipped with a computer system. Council does not expect the Club's offices to move from 21 Regent Terrace in the foreseeable future.

6. To liaise with other voluntary bodies and to raise awareness of the Club.

It seems likely that more people would wish to join the Club if they knew about it and greater effort should be made in publicising it, both by Branches and centrally. Use of Club projects can be made to encourage participation by new and potential members. There is some scope for co-operation with other bodies like the BTO, the SWT, the ringing-groups and other societies, for example with joint meetings and with identifying sites of ornithological interest.

John Arnott, President

# Having a whale of a time

There can be few birdwatchers who don't also enjoy seeing wild mammals, especially the larger ones. However opportunities for observing mammals are limited in Britain since several species, including all the large carnivores, have been exterminated - at least on land. At sea things are different. Despite persecution it is still possible to see big whales off the Scottish coast and seawatchers can contribute useful data by recording cetaceans as well as seabirds.

## What to see and when to see them

Of the 24 species of whales and dolphins recorded in British and Irish waters, 12 of these are regularly seen close to our coasts. These include not only the smaller species such as the 1 metre harbour porpoise in estuaries and sheltered bays, but also large whales including the 20 metre fin whale, seen mainly off the Western Isles.

It is not difficult to see some of these creatures if you go to the right places at the right time. The richest areas are in NW and N Scotland (particularly the Outer Hebrides and Shetland Isles), Southern and Western Ireland; and the best months for seeing most species are July to September. Although opportunities are increased by taking a boat a little offshore, most species have been seen from the clifftop, and some are predominantly coastal.

The more inshore small cetaceans include the harbour porpoise, the bottle nosed dolphin and the Risso's dolphin whilst amongst larger species the minke whale and killer whale may be seen regularly from headlands and offshore islands. Offshore species such as the sperm whale, pilot whale and false killer whale may

also come into coastal waters. Some have a mainly northerly distribution, such as the white-beaked and white-sided dolphins.

## Calm seas and patience

Cetaceans are unlike seabirds in several important aspects. You won't see them anything like as often which is why counting seabirds is good therapy for the frustrated whale watcher. When you do see them views are often frustratingly brief with only a fin and a part of a back visible. To help spot cetaceans it is best to watch during calm sea conditions which is rather different from seabirds which are usually most interesting during onshore gales. Experienced cetacean watchers never watch for less than an hour, longer in localities where they are known to be scarce, which for us in Scotland means the south east coasts. The search pattern is not quite the same as for seabirds - it's best to scan more slowly as a breaking fin is harder to pick up than a flying bird and investigate any movement in the sea, even though 99% will not be due to a whale or a dolphin.

## Why count cetaceans?

As with most wildlife nowadays there is a conservation angle. Declines in the big,

baleen whales due to hunting have been well publicised. Less publicity has been given to change in numbers of smaller species. Porpoises have certainly declined in some Scottish waters - for example Fred Marr rarely sees them on his daily boat trips to the Bass Rock yet they used to be regular in the Firth of Forth in summer. Apart from deliberate killing which is rare in British waters - but does occur with both French and Scandinavian ships involved - drowning in fishing nets, collisions with boats, overfishing, pollution, noise disturbance from ships' propellers are all threats or potential threats to cetaceans.

## How you can help

In 1973 the Cetacean Group was formed to obtain information on the whales and dolphins around our shores. We now have a network of about 350 observers from all walks of life. Much of the information provided above has come for the Cetacean Survey, involving to a very large extent amateurs; and it has provided considerable pleasure for many who did not realise they could see these fine creatures within sight of our shores. There is an urgent need to continue to improve upon and expand the sightings network, to fill in gaps in coverage, and identify conservation problems. Everyone who visits the sea is urged to help. If you see porpoises or dolphins very regularly, please do not take them for granted. Logging of every one of those observations would be extremely valuable.

Please address all correspondence to Dr P G H Evans, Cetacean Group, c/o EGI Zoology Dept., S Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PS. Tel No. 0865-247448.

# What's in your Garden?

Do you already spend time watching the birds in your garden, or would you like to discover more about them? A new survey, to start in September, will gather information on garden birds across Britain. The BTO has decided that, in view of the increasing importance that gardens have for wildlife in general, and particularly for birds, that an expanded research programme on garden birds should be undertaken. The Project has been made possible by funding from BASF, through WWF-UK.

For the last 17 winters a small sample of gardens have been watched by BTO members, who recorded birds visiting feeding stations. Their efforts resulted in the publication of *The Garden Bird Book*, edited by David Glue. Now we intend to follow the fortunes of our bird populations in a much more extensive survey throughout the year. All four seasons will be observed and separately logged to give data on the occurrence of nesting birds in gardens throughout the UK, and information on garden use during passage. Not only will we be able to map the distribution of garden species in all regions of Britain, and monitor seasonal and long term abundance, but we will be targeting certain species of interest. The seedeaters, eg Tree Sparrow and Linnet, are showing a rapid decline on intensively farmed land and may be resorting to gardens. We are very keen to gather data from Scotland, both for the more common

and widespread species and those which are more frequently recorded in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain, eg Siskin, Redwing and Waxwing.

All surveyors will receive a 'starter' pack, containing survey cards, instructions, and a full colour poster. To describe your garden you complete the survey card questions and then you are asked for the maximum count of species which use the garden each week. All the data will be stored and analysed on a computer. Participants will receive a newsletter so that they can follow the pro-

gress of the survey, and hear of unusual and interesting features.

People of all ages can contribute to this project; it requires no travel and little preparation - just good powers of observation and some patience! We aim to recruit over 5,000 participants, and hope for a particularly good response from Scotland, where the use of gardens by birds has been relatively little recorded. If you would like to take part please contact Lysbeth Muirhead, BTO, Beech Grove, Station Road, TRING, Herts, HP23 5NR.

# Cold Weather in Norway

Early in 1987 I happened to visit Trondheim at the time of the influx of northern birds and seals described in *SBN 6*. The temperature fell to -23° C on the night of 9 January, which is considered cold even in Norway, and it was even colder inland; the following day the sea began to smoke in a most extraordinary manner normally only seen in the remoter parts of the polar regions. All our plumbing froze and even the side of the ship split in the cold. The only birds to be seen were a few adult gulls, Cormorants, Eiders, Sea Eagles and Hoodies, with more young gulls and wildfowl around the ports, and one small passerine crossing the fjord (it would be interesting to know how it survived). Apparently most of the other birds must have moved to Scotland.

W.R.P. Bourne



Siskin  
E.C. Fellowes

## Fulmar incubating Swan's egg

While working as summer warden in 1985 on the RSPB reserve at Balranald in North Uist, the following interesting discovery was made. I was doing a routine check on a pair of breeding Mute Swans on a small "dun island" (30 ft in diameter) on one of the lochs. Nine eggs had been incubated, 8 of which hatched, leaving one addled egg in the nest. When I approached the nest a Fulmar clumsily flew off and landed on the water close by. A Fulmar egg lay tucked in beside the Swan's egg - both eggs were warm from the incubating bird. I checked the nest again on 10th June but found both eggs gone.

Iain C MacLeod



White Puffin  
Anon.

## White Puffin on the Isle of May

On 21st June this year we were delighted to see a white Puffin on the sea - 400 metres from the island. The plumage was entirely white except for some black on the trailing edge of the wings but the beak was normal. I believe white Puffins have also been seen on Craighleith in the Forth and on the Farnes so the most unusual feature of the May bird may be that it managed to visit the Island and not be seen or ringed by Mike Harris!

Roy Turnbull

## Amorously aquatic Redshank

On 21st June 1987, I inadvertently disturbed a female Redshank with three newly hatched chicks feeding at the edge of Wards Ponds, Gartocharn, Dunbartonshire. Taking the most direct line of escape, the family group began swimming slowly but steadily across 100 metres of shallow, open water. When just about halfway across the pond a male Redshank flew over to the swimming birds and deliberately landed on the female's back, momentarily forcing her below the water surface. After struggling from under her assailant, the female chased off the over-amorous male before pitching down on the far bank to await the safe arrival of the three chicks a few minutes later.

John Mitchell

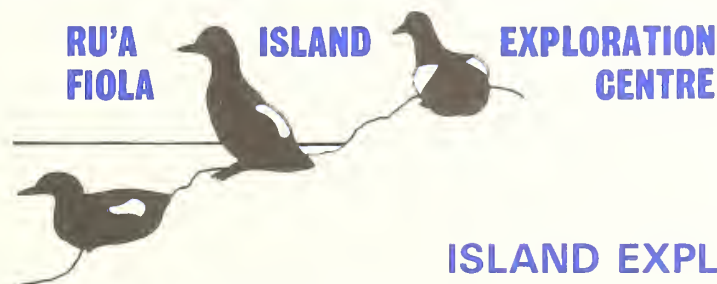
## Fleas please

Anyone able to collect the larvae of fleas from birds especially House Martins on natural sites, Puffins and Shearwaters should contact Prof R L C Pilgrim, Zoology Dept., University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand for details of collecting procedures.

Although we are happy to draw members attention to what is undoubtedly a scientifically valuable project we must stress that under no circumstances should samples of fleas be sent to 21 Regent Terrace.



Fulmar and Swan's egg  
Iain C. MacLeod



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## ISLAND EXPLORERS

Rubha Fiola, one of the Lunga islands in the Firth of Lorne southwest of Oban, is surrounded by many wild and fascinating uninhabited islands. Torquil and Margaret Johnson-Ferguson's island home and Adventure Centre makes a perfect base from which to explore them.

Their special island Explorer weeks are for everyone (minimum unaccompanied age 17) who loves wild uninhabited islands, be they bird-watchers, artists, botanists, divers or just romantics. For anyone who wants to get away from it all for a few days of perfect peace and tranquility in this outstandingly beautiful area. Not only do you get the chance to enjoy living on an otherwise uninhabited island for a week, but also our boat will take you to as many of the surrounding islands as time and weather permits - hopefully a different one each day.

Choose from Eileach an Naoimh with its ruined monastery and beehive cell, the soaring limestone cliffs of Garvellach, Dun Chonnuill with its Fort and Dun, or A'Chuli, all Sites of Special Scientific Interest; or Eilean Dubh Mor, Eilean Dubh Beag and Guirasdeal with their Common Seal colonies; or 1470 ft. high Scarba with its Raised Beaches and caves; and Belnahua with its ruined ghost-village and slate quarries, or the lighthouse islands of Fladda and Dubh Sgeir; frighteningly haunted Eilean a'Bhealaich, surrounded by the fearsome and spectacular Little Corryvreckan Whirlpool; or rocky Ormsa and Liath Sgeir; Fiola Meadhonach and Eilean nan Caen where the wild otters live or Fiola an Droma with its tidal rapids and more seals, and peaceful Lunga with its hidden nooks and crannies, red deer, and big sandy bay where Saint Columba landed. A choice for all weathers and tastes, all privately owned by caring landowners who permit you the privilege of exploring them while staying at Ru'a Fiola.

Over a traditional Scottish breakfast we will decide on the islands for the day, and we take you there with a packed lunch. You are then free to 'do your own thing' until the boat picks you up in the afternoon to return you to Ru'a Fiola, for a big hot meal. Alternatively we can provide Tent or Prehistoric Cave, and stove, food and sleeping bag for an overnight stay in blissful solitude, if you are really adventurous.

On Ru'a Fiola accommodation is single or twin-bedded rooms with heating. Facilities are on Hostel lines as per the Adventure Course Prospectus available on request. Maximum number of participants is 12, no maximum age! Weeks start Saturdays 19th September, 26th September, 3rd October and 31st October 1987, and end the following Fridays. Our boat will meet you at the start of your stay at 3.30 pm at Cullipool Pier, Isle of Luing, to where there is easy access by car and by public transport. The all-inclusive cost of the week, from Cullipool, for the six nights, is £165.00 including VAT.

To book, send your requirements and a Deposit of £33.00 to Ru'a Fiola; or if you require more details, or information on our Island Castaway and Survival Courses for Adults, Ghosthunters' Week, Youngsters' Adventure Courses, or Self-catering Cottage on Garvellach Island, write to Torquil Johnson-Ferguson at Ru'a Fiola.

# Scottish Gamebirds

Increasingly, conservation and research institutes like the Game Conservancy, BTO and RSPB are concentrating their efforts on the large proportion of British countryside that is farmed and have been assessing the impact of land use practices on our terrestrial avifauna. Although a range of species can be used it is often instructive to monitor certain species and use these to assess the impact of land use practices; in effect ornithological barometers.

Some of the best barometers of our countryside are the indigenous gamebirds, in particular the Grey Partridge, Red Grouse and Black Grouse, a group of species that are characteristic of farmland, moorland and birch scrub respectively. All are species that do not migrate and have been monitored, through bag records, for well over a century. Although numbers of gamebirds may fluctuate greatly from one year to the next all species have shown a decline in numbers in Scotland, particularly since the last war. Not surprisingly the decline is associated with loss of habitat and Grey Partridges have declined as hedgerows have been pulled out, Red Grouse as heather moorland has been replaced by forestry and Black Grouse as grazing animals have failed to allow birch to regenerate.

Though changes in the extent of suitable habitat have caused a decline in gamebirds, these changes alone cannot account for the extent of decline and other factors have influenced the overall density of gamebirds. Reduced availability of preferred food items and increased losses to predators seem to have been important in all species. This was shown clearly in a long term study of Grey Partridge by Dick Potts and summarised in his recent monograph on the species. Partridge chicks, like all gamebirds, require a rich protein source during the first few weeks of life and they obtain this by eating insects. On farmland, the chicks selectively take plant bugs and the larvae of sawfly that depend on the weeds associated with cereal fields. The rapid increase in cereal



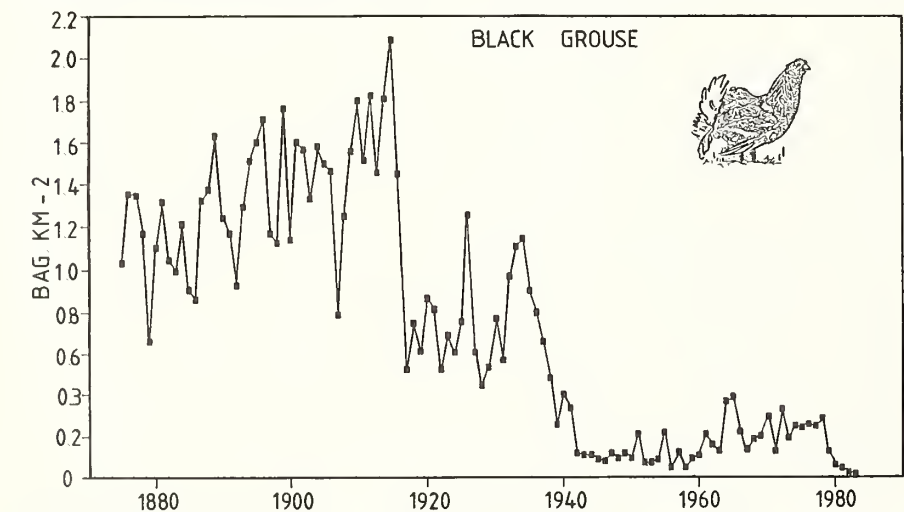
Red Grouse at nest

William S. Paton

herbicides between 1955 and 1975 has effectively removed the weeds that grew alongside cereal fields and so indirectly the insects the Partridge chicks need. To reduce this trend and produce areas within cereal fields which benefit wildlife, Nick Sotherton of the Game Conservancy has developed a technique of selectively spraying crop margins and producing what have become known as 'conservation headlands'. These have proved to be highly attractive to small mammals, butterflies and birds and have

resulted in both a doubling in Partridge chick survival and an increase in density. The application of pesticides is carefully controlled to provide maximum benefits to wildlife and minimum costs to the farmer in terms of yield quantity and quality. Insect abundance is also important for our other gamebirds and Red Grouse and Black Grouse take their broods to wet boggy areas where insects are abundant so the chicks grow and survive well. In certain instances hill drainage could empty rich boggy areas, reduce insect life and have a detrimental effect on grouse and other moorland species such as Golden Plover and Dunlin.

All our gamebirds nest on the ground and tend to be vulnerable to predators, in particular Foxes and Crows. To some extent levels of predation have increased as a consequence of man's slovenliness in the countryside. On hill ground, farmers receive a headage payment for their sheep so there is a tendency to have more sheep than the ground can carry resulting in dead animals littering the hill and providing carrion. In the mountains, tourists, climbers and skiers leave debris which attracts Crows to the high tops to take the eggs of montane species like Ptarmigan and Dotterel.



Black Grouse bags over the last 100 years

Artwork Peter Hudson

The scenario of change in the countryside seems to be one of lost habitat coupled with a fall in food availability and followed by increased predation. A downward spiral of care and management leads to a fall in gamebirds and some other bird species associated with the habitats managed for game. On farmland, hedgerows have been removed, farmers have been forced into a treadmill of pesticides reducing wild flowers, associated insects and feeding opportunities for some birds; the subsequent fall in gamebirds means that keepers are made redundant or are asked to rear Pheasants. A similar pattern can be seen in the uplands; grouse stocks fall, to balance the books the landowner sells an area to forestry, predators increase reducing grouse numbers in neighbouring areas and we see a domino effect of a series of traditional grouse moors, with all their associated species, disappearing.

We need to focus our attention on the countryside as a whole, not just Nature Reserves and take heed of our gamebird barometers. Most of the countryside is managed for food production, however by providing incentives for farmers and landowners it is possible to introduce conservation measures. One incentive lies in game production, which gives an additional crop to the farmer and preserves a habitat for wildlife. Game interests have maintained the heather moorlands of Scotland; the vast areas of commercial forestry in Perthshire would never have occurred if grouse shooting as a sport had remained viable.

Lower costs and more incentives for landowners to retain keepers on the ground would certainly help the maintenance of internationally important habitats, at least for open country species. Traditionally, conservationists view the keeper as the villain of the countryside and I suspect some are - but then some conservationists are also less than perfect - yet through his activities he has managed to maintain the habitat we need for other, specialised birds. There will always be Golden Plover, Merlin and Hen Harriers where there are grouse yet these all go when there are large scale changes in land use. As conservationists I believe we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath-water and start to perceive our Scottish stalkers and keepers in a more favourable light since the heart of conservation is the safeguarding of important habitats.

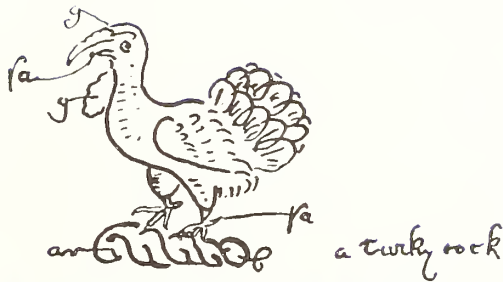
**Peter Hudson**

*Dr Hudson is in charge of upland research for the Game Conservancy, based near Newtonmore, and the author of 'Red Grouse: the biology and management of a wild gamebird'.*



*Black Cock at Lek*

*Robert T. Smith*



# A Dictionary of Birds

Edited by **BRUCE CAMPBELL** and **ELIZABETH LACK**

Compiled for the British Ornithologists' Union the book enlists major contributions from over 280 ornithologists from 29 countries. Their authoritative accounts cover the field of modern ornithology and related subjects. Its editors and contributors, to text and illustrations, gave their time and knowledge at no cost and have earned the thanks and acclaim of users for many years to come.

"A Dictionary of Birds is an impressive contribution to ornithology. The work is impressive both in size and scope. The book is well illustrated with informative photographs, drawings of birds (generally one per family) and many text diagrams. The standard of production is excellent; the editors and the publishers have successfully made this extremely hefty work of reference into a most attractive book. For many ornithologists, I suspect the Dictionary will prove one of the single most valuable books to have been published for several years. Rob Fuller, BTO News

28 x 21cm, 700 pages, £39.00 net

**T & A D POYSER**

## Moorland Bird Surveys on Shetland in 1986

In the recent past there have been significant losses of moorland in Shetland, largely due to the process of apportionment of common grazings. This usually means that moorland becomes fenced, which often leads to localised over-grazing and consequent erosion. The moorland may also be fertilised and seeded with agricultural grasses - a process which is destructive of the natural plant communities. The Moorland Bird Study of the NCC undertook an extensive survey of the birds of Shetland moorlands between May and July 1986. The aim was to investigate the numbers and distribution of breeding birds, and to provide information that could be used to aid the conservation of the most important moorlands and their birds.

The survey concentrated on mainland Shetland, Yell and Unst, and followed work undertaken by the RSPB in 1985 and by local NCC staff over several years. Despite severe weather in early summer, 32 sites, covering a total of 225 km<sup>2</sup> were visited several times through the season. The detailed survey sites were chosen so that the complete range of moorland variation across the islands would be represented.

The best sites held high numbers of breeding waders such as Golden Plover, Dunlin and Curlew, along with the Shetland specialities of Whimbrel, Arctic and Great Skuas. In total ten species of breeding wader were found, with Golden Plovers being the most frequent, occurring on all 32 sites surveyed. Curlew occurred at the highest densities, particularly on sites in south mainland. Snipe were surprisingly frequent, with breeding birds on all but one of the sites. There is no doubt that Shetland is an important breeding area for this species. Dunlin were frequent on the extensive peatlands of Yell, but became more scarce and bred at significantly lower densities further south in Shetland. Red-throated Divers were found on most sites, although densities recorded were less than the recorded maxima of other studies. This may have been partly due to slight differences in timing of our studies compared with previous diver surveys.

In comparison with other moorland areas in Britain, the densities of breeding waders in Shetland were found to be amongst the highest, with a few sites being of exceptional conservation importance. At the end of the bird surveys, maps of vegetation and other features were made on each site. This allowed us to look at the important factors influencing the distribution of individual birds species. One of the major influences determining the number of breeding birds appeared to be the amount of peat erosion that had taken place. Fewer birds were found on the more heavily eroded areas with large expanses of bare peat. The causes of such erosion are uncertain, with much of the worst gullying obviously having been proceeding for many decades, if not longer, though over-grazing seems to be a significant factor. The results of the survey will investigate the relationship between vegetation, erosion and birds in considerable detail. This information can then be used by NCC staff to provide advice on those moorland management practices which are not detrimental to moorland breeding birds.

**Alison Rothwell & David Stroud**

## RSPB Challenge Government Over Forestry

Taxpayers' money is being used to subsidise private forestry and destroy a unique corner of the Scottish countryside, says the RSPB in a report published this summer. The report reveals that £12.3 million of public money is being paid to less than 100 private investors to plant conifers in the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland. The effect on birds was covered in *SBN* 3: to quote RSPB President Magnus Magnusson "This forestry has already destroyed the nesting and feeding grounds of one fifth of the most important wading bird populations, such as Greenshank, Dunlin and Golden Plover, and is gradually destroying the Flow Country's outstanding blanket peatlands - which are of global importance and the most valuable area for nesting moorland birds in the UK."

'Forestry and the Flows' examines the system of public funding which attracts private investors to this type of forestry where almost 70 per cent of private forestry's costs are covered by grants and tax relief from the public purse, but the expected return to the nation is only 1.3 per cent. This fails to meet the Government's own requirements of at least a 3 per cent return from forestry investment.

'Forestry in the Flows of Caithness and Sutherland' is available from the RSPB's Conservation Planning Department, 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, EH7 5BN, price £2.50 including postage.



Golden Eagle with Manx Shearwater  
John F. Love

## Pollutants kill eagle

*A report of record levels of PCBs as well as DDE, Dieldrin and mercury in an immature Golden Eagle found dead in Lewis indicates that worrying levels of pollutants are present in the Atlantic as the bird had been taking Fulmars which, in turn, had probably fed extensively on fish offal. The analysis was carried out by Ian Newton's team at ITE, Monks Wood, and emphasises the value of sending in corpses of predators such as raptors, owls and herons: more on this story in the next issue of SBN.*

## A National Centre for Ornithology

For the last 24 years, the BTO has had its headquarters at Beech Grove, a Victorian mansion in Tring, Hertfordshire, which can no longer house the ever growing needs of the Trust. Recent expansion to 57 staff has caused an accommodation crisis, resulting in the purchase of two portakabins and the eviction of the Trust's library to rented space in Tring. Now, the BTO is planning to build a National Centre for Ornithology adjacent to the bird section of the British Museum (Natural History) in Tring, to provide both a new headquarters and a focus for ornithology in Britain. The Trust hopes that the project will receive the full support of ornithologists in Scotland, who will reap the benefits of the better back-up for their own studies, and a base for ornithological trips to the south.

The National Centre will physically bring together the staff and facilities of the BTO and the bird section of the British Museum. Other specialist ornithological bodies are being invited to share space at the Centre. The Centre will provide facilities for the use of visiting bird clubs. In order to strengthen links with local groups, the BTO is already developing a partnership with Britain's bird clubs, which aims to communicate information and ideas as well as promoting the membership and funding of ornithological groups, both local and national. Facilities will include offices for the coordination of projects, as well as their associated data archives and computing facilities. There will also be the BTO's lending library, a shop and display area, and a lecture theatre for the use of visiting groups, workshops and conferences. Adjacent to the Centre will be a five acre bird studies and conservation area, for use in training courses eg census techniques, ringing. The Museum will be a partner in the project with which facilities will be shared. Existing facilities at the Museum include an impressive exhibition hall, the unique research collections, the Rothschild Ornithological Library and laboratories. Some limited accommodation for visiting researchers will also be developed.

Although located in England, the Centre will have useful implications for Scottish ornithologists. By improving facilities, the Centre will ensure stronger back-up to BTO members throughout Britain in the administration and analyses of survey work. Visitor accommodation will allow researchers from Scotland to stay at the Centre to extract information from the Trust's data banks, as well as coming to workshops and training courses. Other developments within the Trust will enable stronger links to be forged with the SOC, such as are now being planned for the New Breeding Bird Atlas.

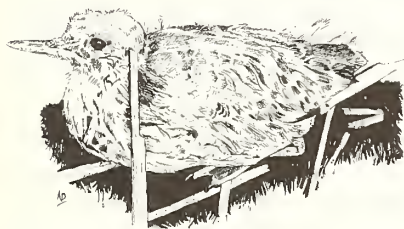
The entire project will cost around £1.5 million, for which an Appeal has begun. The project was given a magnificent boost with two most generous donations of land (under lease) by the Trustees of the British Museum and the Hon. Jacob Rothschild. Many donations have already been made to the project, and if you can help, or you have contacts who could help, please write as soon as you can to Mike Moser, at Beech Grove, Tring, Herts.

## Composite Colony

In *SBN* 3: 2 H.E.M. Dott, and in *SBN* 5: 7 A.W. Brown, describe composite Black-headed Gull/Common Gull/Common Tern colonies in Inverness-shire and the Borders. The three species have been known to nest in association at the Haugh of Kercock on the Tay, some 25 kilometres upstream of Perth, since at least 1983, and the Common Gull and Common Tern since the early 1970's.

The presence of the Common Gull predates the Black-headed gull, and its numbers are much greater at Kercock than at the Inverness-shire and Border sites: 238 nests in '84, 301 in '85 and 339 in '87; in 1985 there were 180 Black-headed Gull nests, and a minimum 4 nests of Common Tern. The Common Gull colony has spread from one main island in the early '70's to include areas on two other islands and surrounding banks by 1987. The Terns, which arrive much later in the season, occupied areas between 1983 and '85 which were still under water when the gulls began to nest in April.

The timing of hatching of the various species is of interest. In 1984 and '85 the majority of Black-headed Gulls hatched within a few days of each other, at the same time as the earliest Common Gulls, which had a much more protracted season, with hatching going on over several weeks. The Common Terns hatched later in the season, when the last of the Common Gulls were still on eggs.



*Black-headed Gull chick*  
Andrew Dowell

Kercock shares a certain hazardous aspect with the sites in Inverness-shire and the Borders. In mid-May 1986, very high water was responsible for the destruction of an estimated 550 Gull nests. Only 30-40 Common Gull chicks fledged; the Terns, starting to nest later, were apparently unaffected, and there was an estimated 12 pairs. In 1987 the Black-headed Gulls did not attempt to nest and, whilst the number of pairs of Common Gull increased over the 1985 figure they did not occupy the areas vacated by their former neighbours. Four Common Tern nests were found.

Small numbers of adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls have summered at Kercock since 1984, but without evidence of attempted breeding.

*Michael Martin*

*Further reports of such colonies should be submitted to local recorders rather than SBN.*

## Snow bathing again

On 11 January 1987 at 14.00 hrs in my garden in Dundee, I observed a Starling snow-bathing in about 12cm of soft powdery snow lying on top of a 1.5 metre high privet hedge. The bird repeatedly pushed itself through the snow and vigorously threw snow over its back with its wings. It also took snow in its beak, although it was not possible to see if it was actually eating snow or attempting to apply more snow to its plumage. After about two minutes, it was joined by a second Starling, which behaved similarly for about a further minute until a third Starling briefly joined the performance. The second and third birds flew off together, and the first Starling stayed only a few seconds longer. However, before it left, it was joined by a male House Sparrow which seemed to copy the behaviour, and snow-bathed for about 20 seconds.



*Starling*  
David G. Mitchell

On 13 January 1987 at about 15.00 hrs at the same site, my father observed two Starlings snow-bathing for several minutes in about 15 cm of soft powdery snow on the ground.

I also recall seeing a prolonged bout of communal snow-bathing involving several House Sparrows (curiously, all males) at the same site during later afternoon about 1980. On this occasion, soft powdery snow had filled a basin sitting on the ground, and the birds used only this for bathing, although identical snow covered the ground nearby, perhaps because the rim of the basin provided a firm perch. This snow-bathing continued for many minutes until the basin was almost emptied of snow.

On all occasions there was suitable fresh water standing nearby. It would seem that snow-bathing is an alternative means of plumage-care similar to dusting, rather than an alternative to bathing in water if none is available.

*Colin R. McLeod*

## Rook taking vole as prey

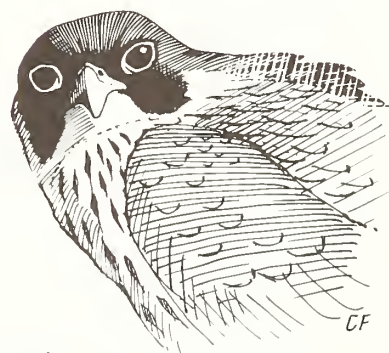
While travelling along the M9 between Stirling and Edinburgh on 21st April 1987 the following was seen. I noticed a small party of Rooks hopping about the motorway about 400 m. in front of me. As the car ahead of me approached, four of the Rooks flew up from the road and across the central reservation. As I neared, one Rook quickly doubled back. At that moment a short-tailed vole shot out from the edge of the hard-shoulder and ran across the road. The Rook dropped down and plucked up the vole with great dexterity then flew off, just missing my windshield, with the vole dangling from its beak.

*Iain C MacLeod*

## Peregrine calling in autumn

At 0800 GMT on 8th November 1986, I heard the "cacking" call of a Peregrine in the wooded garden of a country house in Central Perthshire. A female Peregrine was circling around the house and flying among the trees, approaching as close as 20m to the house, and "cacking" all the time it was circling. A male Sparrowhawk was patrolling the garden about 100m to the south of the falcon, but there was no apparent interaction between the two birds. At 0804 GMT the Peregrine landed about two-thirds of the way up a 40m high Wellingtonia tree, 50m from the house, settled there, and stopped calling. A few minutes later the calls of two Buzzards were heard in the general area of the garden. At 0814 GMT the Peregrine flew from the Wellingtonia, again "cacking", and landed 20m away, half-way up a 30m high Silver Fir, the branches of which blocked my view of the bird. Two Jays, calling loudly, gradually approached the Peregrine and at 0817 GMT the falcon flew off, this time without calling.

BWP Vol 2 states that the Peregrine seldom calls away from the nesting territory, especially outside the breeding season, and both BWP and Ratcliffe's 'The Peregrine Falcon' describe the "cacking" call as an aggressive vocalization given in response to disturbance from any intruder near an eyrie. Dougall (*SB* 13:188) reported a similar observation of a Merlin calling in autumn. There seemed no apparent reason why the Peregrine was "cacking". No other Peregrines were seen at the time and there were certainly no humans visible in the area. The nearest Peregrine eyrie is about 3.5km from the house.



*Peregrine*  
Crispin Fisher

Interestingly a week later, on 14th November 1986, while walking beside the River Eden near Guardbridge, Fife, I again heard a Peregrine "cacking". On this occasion, a male falcon carrying medium-sized, unidentified prey, was being mobbed by a Carrion Crow. The "cacking" in this instance seemed harsher and faster than in the Perthshire case. The birds disappeared behind trees about 1km away, the crow still persistent in its attack. It seemed that the Peregrine was trying to outfly the crow, but due to the weight of prey it was slowed down.

*Wendy Mattingley*

# Musselburgh Ash Lagoons

Birds are mobile creatures that can quickly exploit man made habitats if they provide suitable conditions. The lagoons which take ash from Cockenzie Power Station in East Lothian have covered some wader feeding areas but do provide a safe roost site for thousands of waders, while the new sea wall is an excellent vantage point for studying a wide variety of sea and shorebirds. Ian Andrews, local recorder and author of 'Birds of the Lothians', describes how to get the best out of a visit to Musselburgh.

Before the 1960's the area between the mouth of the Midlothian Esk and Prestongrange was natural foreshore with extensive mussel beds, as are found on the west side today. During 1946-66 the South of Scotland Electricity Board constructed a series of four lagoons east of the river mouth behind a concrete seawall. Subsequently the area was progressively infilled from the east by the disposal of waste ash. At present only the westernmost lagoon remains and is virtually full; a series of higher level lagoons have recently been constructed to allow the dumping of ash to continue for several years to come.

## Where and when to go

Access on foot is allowed in most areas except, for safety reasons, the active lagoons. Park either by the old gas works (Balcarres Road) or at the end of the river-side road (Goosegreen Crescent). The route taken really depends on the state of the tide. At low tide, the river mouth has most activity and from there you can then walk the length of the seawall. At very high tide, although the sea will be worth a look later, it will be necessary to explore the lagoon areas where the waders and gulls roost. Problems with bad lighting only really affect the river mouth, where it becomes particularly difficult late on a sunny day; early mornings are better.

The best time for a visit is some three hours before a spring tide, rather later for a neap tide. At this time waders are gradually pushed off the river mouth and the ducks move closer. When looking out to sea it is difficult to say where ducks and divers will be. The best strategy is to walk a short way, stopping and scanning. The east end of the corner lagoon (the 'point') sticks out furthest and is worth the longest look. You can then walk as far as you wish, but go at least as far as the sewage outfall in the bay. You can then return on a route behind the lagoons. On a ris-



Wader flock with Cockenzie Power Station in the background

S.R.D. da Prato

ing tide the Fisherrow shore provides an opportunity to get good views of waders.

## The birds

Along with Aberlady Bay this is the most watched area in the Lothians and, at the correct state of tide, it is the best place to obtain good views of the common waders, gulls and ducks. In winter sea ducks and other water birds can be seen well from the seawall, especially in calm weather. Long-tailed Duck, Common and Velvet Scoter often congregate in the bay west of the lagoons but you will need a powerful telescope; good numbers are easier seen from the 'point' area eastwards, which is also a good place to look for divers (mainly Red-throated) and grebes (Great Crested, Slavonian and Red-necked). Eiders congregate around the mussel beds at all but

high tide when they drift offshore. Groups of Goldeneye can be seen at the river mouth and the outfall; these are also the most favoured sites for the odd Smew. A male Surf Scoter was seen off the river mouth on 13 November 1983, but we are still waiting for our first King Eider. Large Scaup flocks of up to 30,000 are a thing of the past and recent counts rarely exceed 25.

Auks occur in small numbers, but often close in to the seawall. Occasional Black Guillemots and Little Auks are seen; on 17 November 1985 233 Little Auks flew east past the lagoons, and larger than usual numbers of the other auks also occurred as part of the 'wreck'.

The mussel beds at the mouth of the Esk attract thousands of feeding waders. Although construction caused the loss of some feeding areas many more birds can now roost in the area rather than making the long flight to other safe roosts such as Aberlady.

Gulls, often in hundreds, feed and bathe on the river at low tide. They are joined by thousands more in the evening. If you like gull watching this is the place to scan for a Glaucous.

Peregrines and Merlins hunt the area though sightings tend to be brief. Short-eared Owls occur infrequently. The grassy edges of the lagoons and other rough ground offer winter habitat for many finches and buntings. Linnets are the most numerous, followed by Skylarks, but most winters Snow and Lapland Bunting, Twite and occasionally Shorelark put in an appearance, especially in hard weather. Peak numbers are 590 Snow Buntings in February 1977 and 38 Laplands in February 1987. A few Rock Pipits regularly winter along the seawall, but there are also signs of a passage in October-November. Up river, Grey Wagtail and Dipper can be seen and, less often, Kingfisher.



Long-tailed Ducks

S.R.D. da Prato

Displaying ducks

In late winter and early spring Long-tailed Ducks and Goldeneye display vigorously on fine days and the rarer divers are more likely to be seen.

Gulls are well worth a look in spring. Common Gulls pass through and associated with these can be Mediterranean Gulls and, in 1985, a Ring-billed Gull. Musselburgh has had more records of Mediterranean Gulls than anywhere else in Scotland. Glaucous and Iceland Gulls visit the river mouth but watch for whiter than white, albinistic Herring Gulls.

As spring progresses summer visitors put in an appearance with Terns, Common Sandpiper, Wheatear and White Wagtails the most likely species. The first hirundines in the region are often spotted on the river in mid April. There is a big passage of Turnstones in late April, peaking at over 400, and Ringed Plover pass through until mid-May. Sanderling occur in small numbers in May.

Musselburgh's breeding birds are few; Eider broods are seen and must have bred nearby and Shelduck used to nest in the past. A few pairs of Ringed Plover miraculously rear young in most years, despite seemingly continuous disturbance from lorries. Skylark, Linnet and partridge also breed.

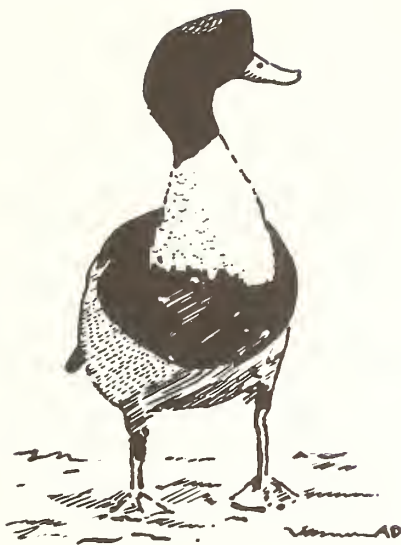
Autumn movements

Return passage starts early and is evident even in June! Curlew numbers build up rapidly in late June and the first Golden Plover, Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit and Grey Plover are recorded soon after. In addition Whimbrel, Ruff, Greenshank and Spotted Redshank are seen occasionally. A good spell of easterly winds usually brings a small influx of Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper. North American waders - White-rumped Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and American Golden Plover - have also been recorded as have several Temmincks' Stints. Passage waders often feed near the river mouth at low tide but can all too easily disappear in the mass of roosting birds. Small flashes in fields, muddy pools and the edge of the boating pond are other potential wader habitats.

August sees huge numbers of terns, mainly Sandwich; a peak of over 1000 can contain many colour-ringed birds which come from Aberdeenshire or the Farnes. Common Terns increase to over 100, and it seems likely that these originate from Leith Docks. In August and September Black Terns, although uncommon, can sometimes be seen at the river mouth while October-early November is the time when small numbers of Little Gulls pass through. In late 1985 Scotland's first Forster's Tern frequented the area.

Wigeon and Teal pass through in autumn and a moulting flock of Red-breasted Merganser builds up to over 400. Pintail and Shoveler are most likely at this time of the year and a Red-crested Pochard was seen in August 1984. A moulting flock of Great Crested Grebes builds to a peak of over 100 in September, but Red-necked Grebes usually arrive much later.

Geese are usually only seen on passage. Pink-feet and Greylags pass over in autumn and during hard weather, and Barnacle Geese have recently been seen with increasing frequency in late September-October. Canada Geese also occur on passage but for this species peak times are in May-June and August-September. Whooper Swans are rare



Shelduck  
Andrew Dowell

and the only Bewick's Swan record is of a flock of 11 seen in November 1972.

Every year a good number of skuas and Manx Shearwaters are seen. In summer Arctic Skuas and shearwaters feeding in the Forth can be seen from the 'point', but in autumn larger passages occur in northerly and easterly gales. The lagoons are very exposed and in good passage conditions it is difficult to find shelter - try in the lee of the hut at the river mouth or below the seawall. Arctic Skuas are many times more common than Greats and some clearly congregate in the bay off Eastfield before making their way back out to sea. Long-tailed Skua, Pomarine Skua and Sabine's Gull are rare autumn seabirds to look out for.

There is little cover for migrant passerines at present. Wheatears occur on passage and may be associated with the odd Whinchat or Yellow Wagtail. Rarities have included Tawny Pipit, Citrine Wagtail and Short-toed Lark.

The future

As infilling is completed East Lothian District Council is to take over the site from the SSEB and develop it as a recreational area. This includes the provision of a bird scrape which is being planned in liaison with the RSPB, SWT and NCC. Large areas will be vegetated, with trees on landward sides and scrub on seaward sides of mounds. The timing of this development is dependent on the supply of ash from the power station. It is already one year behind schedule because of the miners' strike. In addition a seaward extension of new lagoons is still a possibility. It is hoped the scrape will be finished by 1990.

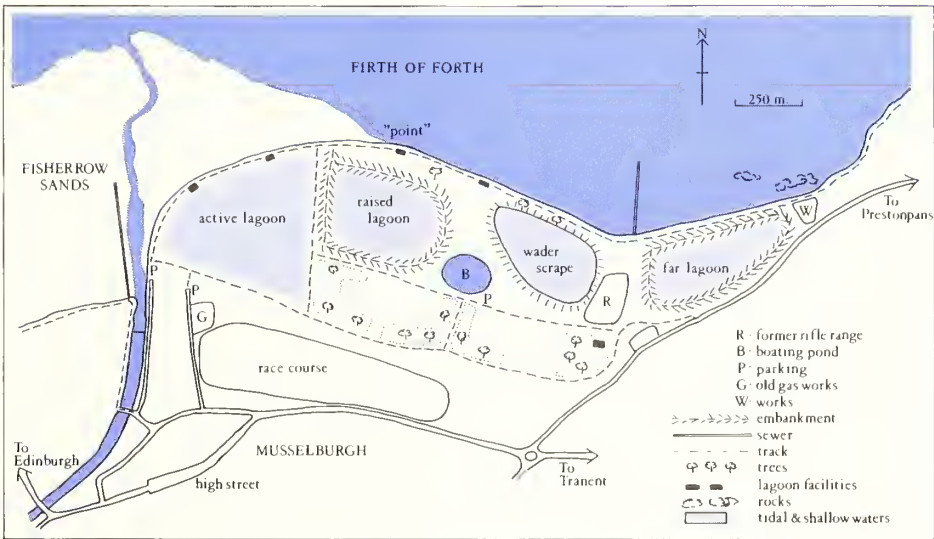
The aim of the scrape is to provide a permanent habitat for waders and provide a facility for the public to watch them at close range. Provision will be made for the disabled. The planned scrape covers an area of over 20 acres and is about 25ft above sea level. It will eventually contain a variety of habitats including a vegetated and screened surround, islands, feeding and roosting areas. A hide will be located on the southern side adjacent to the water inlet. The scrape will be the first of its kind and changes may prove necessary as building develops. Not least of the unknowns is to what extent water will be retained by fly ash, especially at this elevation. A brackish salinity will be maintained using water pumped from the mouth of the Esk, with different salinities available at different states of the tide. Other uncertainties include how plants will grow on the salty ash, especially on the exposed seaward site.

Musselburgh Lagoons have undergone continuous change since their construction, each phase providing different, and at times unexpected, habitats for birds. The feature of the site for birds, and birdwatchers, looks secure and potentially very encouraging.

Ian Andrews

Acknowledgements:

Bob Furness described the effects of the lagoons on waders in *Scottish Birds 1973*. Lance Vick provided information on bird-watching in the early days of their existence



Musselburgh Lagoons and approaches

Artwork Ray D. Murray

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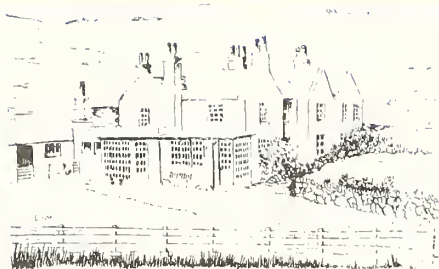
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## Reviews

***Waders* by Desmond and Maimie Nethersole-Thompson; Poyser; 1986; 400 pp; 24 b & w plates; £18**

At no point do the Nethersole-Thompsons claim that *Waders* is an exhaustive review - it is presented, as a personal approach to the behaviour and breeding ecology of waders. Nevertheless, the authors' own researches and their culling of the literature have been wide-ranging, resulting in so much information being packed into the volume that it is an invaluable source book for anyone with an interest in this subject. After a brief account of their own involvement with waders, Ch. 2 extolls the virtues of past enthusiasts and nesters (some of whom could well be behind bars if still active!). Ch. 3 deals with spacing mechanisms and dispersion patterns. This is a valuable summary although little attempt has been made to place the patterns described in an ecological framework. The real meat of the book appears in Ch. 4-10, which present detailed accounts of the breeding biologies of 16 different species. Ch. 9 and 10 are devoted to Woodcock and Dotterel, respectively. The latter is especially good and a significant advance on D.N-T's monograph. Ch. 11 and 12 are less weighty and deal with new and recolonising, and "pipe dream" waders, respectively.

Unlike many others, I have never been an enthusiastic fan of D.N-T's writings. However this book by Desmond and Maimie goes a long way to bringing about my total conversion. I would heartily recommend it to anyone, whether a wader fanatic or not.

**Hector Galbraith**

***Farming and Birds* by Raymond O'Connor and Michael Shrubbs; C.U.P. 1986.; 290 pages; £17.50**

For once the blurb on the cover is accurate - the combination of a professional ornithologist and a working farmer really has produced an objective view of the impact of agriculture (or at least lowland agriculture) on bird populations. Much of the data are from the South but that happens to be where most CBC plots are! Anyone concerned with conservation on farmland should buy this book - they can then clear out a shelf or two of the waffle and propaganda that has dominated this topic for far too long.

**SdP.**

***Trees and wildlife in the Scottish Uplands* ed. by David Jenkins; ITE, Banchory, 1986; 196pp; £7.50.**

Twenty four papers from a symposium of which only two are exclusively about birds; even so this is a useful compendium of recent research into a subject that currently arouses considerable controversy, much of it ill informed. Whether it will improve the quality of the Letters Page of the "Scotsman" is doubtful since it seems that the more extreme the opinions the more they appeal to the media.

**SdP.**

***Wildfowl in Great Britain* (Second Ed.) by M.F. Owen, G.L. Atkinson-Willes & D.G. Salmon; CUP; 1986; £30**

This long-awaited volume summarises much of the data gathered on wildfowl since the first edition appeared in 1963, and brings together a great deal of information not readily accessible elsewhere. The balance of content has changed slightly, with proportionately more space devoted to species accounts and conservation, and less to the survey of habitats and distribution - reflecting the increase in understanding of wildfowl ecology and movements and in awareness of the range of threats to wildfowl and their habitats. It is unfortunate that, despite computerised data handling and type-setting, four years elapsed between the main data cut-off point in 1982 and publication.

Its shape and weight (nearly 4lb) make this book awkward to handle, and some details of its layout are unhelpful to readers - for example, the lack of sub-division in the headings of the 134 pages dealing with "principal species", and the absence of keys beside the summary maps of total wildfowl and regional boundaries. Its price, and the fact that the details of counts are of largely local interest, mean that this book is likely to have a limited appeal. Perhaps the organisations involved (Wildfowl Trust, NCC & WWF) would consider publishing parts III and IV (Species accounts and The conservation of wildfowl and their habitats) on their own, thus making these sections available to a wider readership?

**Valerie M. Thom**

***Birdwatching in Britain: a Site by Site Guide* by Nigel Redman and Simon Harrap; Christopher Helm 1987; 378 pages many black and white illustrations and sketch maps; £12.95**

Once you could buy a paperback copy of John Gooders' *Where to Watch Birds* for 25p to tell you the best places for bird holidays. Later editions of Gooders are dearer and have not been adequately updated. This book is the best now available though I question the policy of producing an expensive hardback since these guides inevitably go out of date quite quickly. Of the 115 principal sites described 73 are in England, 11 in Wales and 31 in Scotland; Ireland is not covered and there is a bias towards the south east, especially coastal sites where migrants turn up. The coverage of Scotland reflects what visitors from the south want to see and large chunks of the country, including everything between Edinburgh and Glasgow, are not mentioned at all. St. Kilda is a notable omission; it is not difficult to reach and a far easier place to see Leach's Petrel than Shetland or seawatching sites in England. However this book will certainly fill in the gaps of your British list. Besides site accounts there are sections on the birdwatching year and an annotated species list; both are helpful but I am tired of reading that Lesser Whitethroats "are virtually absent from Scotland". The list of local recorders only includes those whose areas feature in the site accounts; an unfortunate decision as some of these are inaccurate eg. the East Lothian recorder does not deal with the Bass Rock or Musselburgh.

**SdP.**

***Collins New Generation Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Christopher Perrins; Collins 1987; 320 pages, c1500 colour illustrations; £6.95(s).**

Part of a new series that tries to combine a field guide with information on biology and ecology. The latter aspects are very well covered by Chris Perrins and I was left wishing he had simply written an introductory book on how British birds live. The field guide part of the book is cramped and inferior to most existing guides and I doubt if this generation of hybrids has a future.

**SdP.**

***Seabirds of the World: A Photographic Guide* by Peter Harrison; Christopher Helm; 1987; £15.95**

The author's earlier guide is the best available on seabird identification. The 108 page text in this field guide size companion is considerably condensed but, with the distribution maps and a further 24 pages of illustrated tubenose identification keys, it remains authoritative - and easily carried on your next world cruise! It brings together the largest collection of seabird photos in a single volume. Two colour photos illustrate most species with four for some groups, the quality varying from very good to very poor. Flight shots, even though slightly blurred or at long range, have been preferred to standing portraits since this is how most seabirds are seen. It would be unreasonable to expect them all to be sharp when many were taken in difficult conditions at sea but better photos must be available for some species, eg Sabine's Gull and replacements should surely appear in a further edition. At £15.95 the guide is still good value for money. I hope a future edition will allocate more photos to the difficult species eg. frigate birds and less to the obvious such as penguins at the nest.

**Alan Brown**

***Gulls: A Guide to Identification* by P.J. Grant Poyser; 2nd ed. 1986; 325 pp; many illustrations and 544 b & w photographs £15.00.**

The second edition has been extensively revised. Eight species of west coast American gulls have been added (31 species in total); 72 more pages; 280 new photographs. The definitive work on gull identification.

***Breeding Waders in Europe* compiled by Theunis Piersma; WSG, 1986; 116pp; many illustrations & maps; £5.00.**

A review of population size estimates and a bibliography of information sources of the 37 Palearctic wader species breeding in Europe plus Svalbard, Greenland and Ellesmere Island. Congratulations to Theunis for compiling it and the Wader Study Group for publishing it.

***RSPB Reserve Visiting* edited by Anthony Chapman; 1987; 240pp; many maps & illustrations; £3.95.**

The how to get there, what to look for and where to stay guide to the RSPB's 120 reserves. Very handy, very useful.

**JCD**



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## Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 October for the December number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries - and suggestions - will be welcomed by the Editor. Information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in SB 14(1).

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## SOC Notices

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### British Birds

The independent monthly magazine for every birdwatcher is again available at a special concessionary rate for SOC members - £18.75 instead of the personal subscription rate of £25.00. See the enclosed leaflet for further details.

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The new free 1987/88 Catalogue is now available. Remember, besides getting the best bird and natural history books post and packing free, buying books from your Bookshop helps the Club's funds as well. Write or phone (031-556-6042, 24 hours) now to get your copy.

### Scottish Ringers Conference

The 12th annual conference of bird ringers in Scotland will be held in Braemar over the weekend of 14th & 15th November, 1987. This years conference is being hosted by the Grampian Ringing Group. Details of the conference programme and booking forms can be obtained from Alastair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen, AB2 5DS.

### New Branch Names

As a result of the Club Policy Review, SOC Council decided at its June meeting that each Branch should adopt the name of the area which reflects the part of Scotland in which it has an interest, rather than the present town or city. The local recorders' areas were changed a year or two ago to correspond to the local government regions and districts. This latest change is a logical follow on from this. Following consultation with the branch committees the following list of branch names (with old names in brackets) has been agreed and will be used from now on.

Caithness (Thurso)  
 Highland (Inverness)  
 Grampian (Aberdeen)  
 Tayside (Dundee)  
 Fife (St. Andrews)  
 Stirling (no change)  
 Lothians (Edinburgh)  
 Clyde (Glasgow)  
 Borders (no change)  
 Ayrshire (Ayr)  
 Dumfries (no change)  
 Stewartry (New Galloway)  
 West Galloway (Stranraer)

### Winter Field Trips

Details of this autumn & winter's branch field trips are printed on a separate sheet enclosed with this issue of *Scottish Bird News*.

## RSPB Conservation Review

There is a long and fruitful history of co-operation between the Club and the RSPB in Scotland - which gives me sufficient excuse to use *Scottish Bird News* to draw attention to an important new annual journal - The RSPB Conservation Review - and to seek Club members' support as subscribers.

At only £3 (inc. postage), the first issue is good value for money - so why not give it a try? By doing so you will be helping to further the joint interests of ornithology and bird protection in Scotland will keep up-to-date with the conservation scene too. Orders to RSPB (CL), The Lodge, Sandy, Beds, SG19 2DL.

Mike Everett

## Wader counters wanted!

The Birds of Estuaries Enquiry needs extra counters in most parts of Scotland to help gather data on important bird populations and habitats that are often threatened by various forms of development. Counters receive an annual report as well as the satisfaction that they have contributed to a worthwhile cause. If you feel you can help contact Jeff Kirby, BTO, Beech Grove, Tring, Herts HP23 5NR. Phone No. 044-282 3461.

## Goose weekend at Vane Farm

October brings over 10,000 wildfowl to Loch Leven mostly from Iceland. The RSPB are organising a series of events from Friday 16th to Sunday 18th October, mainly on geese. For details contact Jim Stevenson, Vane Farm Nature Centre, Loch Leven, Kinross, 0577-62355.

## Small Ads

**APRIL COTTAGE.** Stay in this cosy Sussex flint cottage and enjoy the bird life and beauty of the Cuckmere Estuary, the Heritage Coast and South Downs; bed and breakfast with private bathroom £8; other country style meals available as required; open all year. Tel: 0323-890879.

**KINGUSSIE, HIGHLANDS.** Thinking of visiting the Spey Valley? Then why not stay at "Sonhalde" Guest House, AA, STB listed. All home comforts and 5 mins in car from Insh Marshes. Write or phone for details. Tel: 05402-226.

**UPPER GLENISLA - ANGUS.** Very comfortable, well equipped, warm cottage in beautiful setting. Sleeps 3. Available April-October. SAE 31 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BS.

**ARRAN BIRD REPORT 1986.** £1.00 to members from The Bird Bookshop, or £1.25 (inc p & p) from Mrs M H Dunn, Tigh and Droma, Kings Cross, Isle of Arran, KA27 8RG.

**BIRDS OF FIFE.** The original line drawings from this book are for sale. Signed by the artist and in a grey flecked mount they measure 7 x 7. Price of £16.50 includes postage. Please state second and third choice. David Mitchell, 51 Dura Street, Dundee.

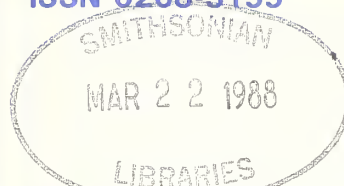


THE SCOTTISH  
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

# Scottish Bird News

DECEMBER 1987  
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No. 8



Edited by Stanley da Prato  
Assisted by Ian Andrews

## Twenty five years on

Few birdwatchers can be unaware that chemicals in the environment can damage birds. But is DDT not a thing of the past and is there still a problem? Ian Newton of ITE's Monk's Wood Experimental Station outlines why a quarter of a century after it was realised that British birds were accumulating lethal pesticide residues there is still a need for birdwatchers to send eggs and corpses for analysis.

Studies of the effects of pesticides and pollutants on birds were started at Monks Wood in 1963. The setting up of this special unit, initially under the direction of Dr Norman Moore, followed widespread incidents of mortality among birds which occurred from the late 1950s, associated with the use of organochlorine pesticides in agriculture. The work on organochlorines has continued ever since, but has widened to include other pollutants, such as industrial polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and heavy metals.

The scheme is based on analyses of eggs and tissues from birds found dead and sent in by interested observers. Attention is focussed on predatory species because they tend to accumulate most pollutants to higher levels than other birds, and are thus more vulnerable to them. Each year we request carcasses of Sparrowhawks, Kestrels, Herons, Kingfishers and Great-crested Grebes, and eggs from Merlins and Peregrines. Each carcass is subjected to a post-mortem examination, and the liver and other tissues removed. Some parts are used for immediate chemical analysis, while others are stored at very low temperature in a 'tissue bank' for possible future use.

As material is received from all regions of Britain, the analytical findings allow us to detect geographical patterns in the levels of various pollutants in the species concerned. They also enable us to follow trends in pollutant levels over the years, and thus check on the effectiveness of government regulations. Observers who send in eggs usually give details of nest success, which allows us to make some assessment of the effects of pollutants on breeding success.

One of the problem chemicals, which has caused much mortality among birds, is known as HEOD, derived from the insecticides aldrin and dieldrin. This chemical was mainly responsible for the



*Heron and prey*

Derek Robertson

population declines of Sparrowhawk, Peregrine and other raptors in the late 1950s. Following restrictions in the use of aldrin and dieldrin, HEOD residues have declined in bird tissues and eggs, and the most affected species have largely recovered in numbers. Over the years, birds from the lowlands of Ayrshire and East Lothian have shown exceptionally high levels of HEOD, perhaps because of the heavy use of dieldrin in cereal seed treatments in these areas. Another important organochlorine, which has caused shell-thinning and egg breakage in some species, is DDE, derived from the insecticide DDT. This chemical continued to be used in quantity in Scotland to a much later date than dieldrin, and its residues have declined in bird tissues to a much lesser extent. Shell-thinning is still evident in such species as Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Merlin.

In contrast to insecticides, residues of industrial PCBs have shown no obvious decline in most of the species examined,

and in some have even increased. PCBs tend to occur at especially high levels in coastal birds, and Peregrines and Golden Eagles which breed near the sea are much more heavily contaminated than their inland neighbours. The effects of PCBs on birds are poorly understood, but in some mammals they cause abortions and embryo deaths.

Mercury in birds is partly natural in origin, but is mostly derived from agricultural and industrial sources. In general, its levels in predatory birds have declined over the years, but it is still present at high levels in Merlins. Those Merlins nesting on the Scottish islands, especially Orkney and Shetland, contain mercury at sufficiently high levels to reduce breeding success. It is not known how they get this mercury, but the problem is currently under investigation.

Recently we received the most contaminated bird ever examined at Monks Wood. This was a young Golden Eagle which had died on Lewis in 1986. The bird had been living near the coast, and feeding partly on Fulmars. Its liver contained (in net weight) 59 ppm HEOD, 182 ppm DDE, 447 ppm PCB and (in dry weight) 176 ppm mercury. The dieldrin alone was easily enough to have killed it. Compared to other seabirds, Fulmars tend to be especially heavily contaminated with persistent chemicals, so represent a particular threat to any predators which eat them.

My colleagues and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the SOC members who over the years have sent carcasses and eggs for analysis at Monks Wood. We would be glad to receive further carcasses and eggs from the species listed above at **Monks Wood Experimental Station, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdon PE17 2LS**. Eggs can be sent either to ourselves or to **Dr J Bogan, Veterinary School, Bearsden Road, Glasgow G61 1QH**, with whom we work in close collaboration.

# Scottish Farming and Birds

Farmers and conservationists can get along rather better than headlines in the media often suggest and there is a lot of scope for co-operation, especially in the Highlands and Islands, where traditional human lifestyles are as vulnerable to powerful outside forces as Choughs and Corncrakes.

The programme for the 1987 SOC Conference had two balanced pairs of conservationists and farmers to set their respective scenes on Saturday morning, with results from individual studies to follow on Sunday. This neat plan promptly collapsed as conservationists like Roy Dennis discussed whether they could afford to continue with cattle on their crofts and Crofter's Union spokesman Jim Hunter recommended an alliance to protect Gaelic culture along with the environment which nourished it.

## The human factor

Several themes were common to all the talks. One was the fact that the land in question has been moulded by people struggling to earn a living for centuries before we were rich enough to afford professional conservationists. It is therefore important to take local sensitivities into account though it was instructive to hear both NCC and NFU spokesmen say that relations on the ground were actually improving on Orkney and Islay, even if some local politicians couldn't always resist the temptation to stir things up. Another point was that it was the lack of investment in modern methods that has allowed birds like Corncrakes to survive in parts of Scotland; it is neither fair or realistic to expect crofters to forego the improvements enjoyed elsewhere without some sort of recompense. The much maligned SSSI's are actually welcome on some islands since they can give farmers revenue but there are problems with present legislation, which doesn't allow payments outwith designated sites despite the fact that birds persist in flying over boundaries.

## European influence

The subsidies available elsewhere in the EEC are mouth watering large; in Germany farmers get up to £600 a hectare to maintain pastures for breeding waders and wild flowers, but only if their land is deemed important enough. Not surprisingly farmers are keen to encourage wildlife. Euro politicians defend this level of spending by pointing out that the CAP exists to safeguard rural communities who otherwise would probably be added to the pool of urban unemployed. Even if this seems unrealistic in the present political climate in Britain, the EEC is a significant factor due to legislation, such as Wild Bird Directives, which call for member states to safeguard habitats as well as species.

## Do birds damage crops?

Of the species that are of conservation interest the answer seems to be sometimes but only at a local level. Currently around 100,000 Greylag and a similar number of Pinkfeet winter on farmland. Iain Patterson's studies show some effect on pasture, especially in late winter, but only on a few fields. He also pointed out that geese can make a field look worse than it really is. A similar story was told by Steve Percival about Barnacle Geese on Islay except that, as they are less mobile than grey geese, damage to pastures can be more significant to a few farmers. He also fascinated the audience with the information that geese produce droppings every five minutes! On Islay compensation is being paid to some farmers but the geese are stubbornly refusing to confine themselves to the designated area.

## The Glenelg eagle

Headlines about lamb killing led Alan Leitch to investigate interactions between Golden Eagles and lambs in an area where sheep and Eagles are at above average density, but more natural prey are scarce, possibly due to grazing pressure. Some lambs were undoubtedly killed although the best estimate amounted to only 1.8% of those born in the area. These lambs were not necessarily sickly individuals and the fact that some were killed in full view of the houses did not encourage a feeling of tolerance among the farming community. A hen eagle, just off the nest and probably very hungry, killed six lambs in a day near the road. It seems disturbance prevented her from feeding on the corpses and this in turn led to further killing.

## Changing land use

More cattle and less sheep would benefit Scotland as a whole but the opposite is more likely as beef is in EEC surplus and sheepmeat is not. If sheep do increase then birds such as Choughs and Corncrakes could suffer through habitat damage. Although even the NFU accept that surpluses must be reduced, and the CAP reformed, their spokesman pointed out some anomalies when local circumstances are not taken into account. Scottish Cheddar is now being made from English milk as the quota system cuts our dairy herds and some creameries are going out of production. There is a case for encouraging beef in Scotland as the local product is still attractive to customers. More trees are inevitable though few want to see conifer monocultures obliterating the uplands. Unfortunately our present tax structure is less generous to farmers who want to integrate woods and other activities than to top rate taxpayers investing in big, specialist forestry firms.

As hill farming generates more income than forestry, and twice that of tourism, it would cause large scale social as well as ecological change if it were suddenly deprived of all state subsidy. Crofting has been regarded as an inefficient anachronism by most politicians and agriculturalists but that view may have to change as the population in places like Lewis actually increases. It has not been lost on the Highlanders that organisations like RSPB have more members than there are people in the Highland Board area. There seems to be a lot of political mileage in pushing for a switch of subsidy towards systems that support people as well as birds.

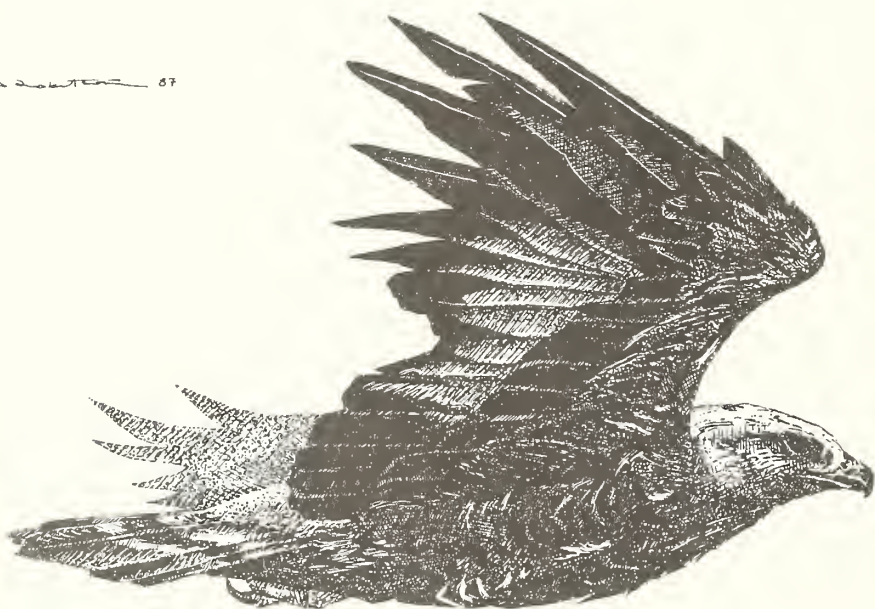
## What they didn't say

With such a wide topic it was inevitable that some aspects were missed out. In particular the Lowlands received short shrift and the conference might have been more accurately titled Farming and Birds in the Highlands and Islands. We really must try a conference on the birds and habitats that most Scots actually live beside!

Stan da Prato

**Thanks:** to the speakers who, in order of appearance, were Jim Hunter (Crofters Union), Eric Bigenel (NCC), John Goodfellow (Scottish NFU), Roy Dennis (RSPB), Alan Leitch (ITE), Steve Percival (Glasgow University), Iain Patterson (Aberdeen University) and Tim Stowe (RSPB), to Annie and Don Smith for projection, to all the members who contributed to the discussion and slide show and to the SOC staff who worked throughout the weekend.

D. Robertson 87



Golden Eagle

Derek Robertson

# Recent Reports

These notes include unchecked reports and are not intended as a permanent record. Please send reports to Pete Ellis, Seaview, Sandwick, Shetland, via local recorders at the end of March, June, September and December. The period July to September is covered here.

Several seabirds, particularly Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes had yet another disastrous breeding season in Shetland. Guillemots fared much better, but, towards the end of September, unusually large numbers began to gather in shore in Shetland and Orkney. Some of these have already died, which suggests that high mortality is again likely to occur in the Northern Isles for the fourth successive winter. There were few days with easterly winds in the early part of the autumn, but none the less many rare birds turned up. August was particularly unusual with influxes of both Greenish Warblers and Two-barred Crossbills into the Northern Isles. September proved even better, and Fair Isle probably had its best year ever for rare birds.

The Whalsay White-billed Diver reappeared early, in mid September, one was seen off Pennan, whilst another was found dead at Wick. The Hermaness Black-browed Albatross was last seen in mid July. Single Cory's Shearwaters were seen off St. Abbs and Turnberry, while good counts of Sooties included a flock of 350 off Birsay and up to 300 per hour off North Ronaldsay in September. 710 Manx Shearwaters off Peterhead was exceptional. Balearic Shearwaters were off Peterhead, Barns Ness, St. Abbs and Turnberry. Leach's Petrels occurred off several sites, including 170 off Troon on 14 September and 141 off Ayr the next day.

A Bar-headed Goose in Stornoway and a Snow Goose at Collieston were the most unusual geese. A King Eider was seen in the Sumburgh moult flock and a Surf Scoter was off Gullane. A White-tailed Eagle was on South Uist in August and Hobbies were on Fair Isle and in Aberdeenshire in July. Quail were on Fair Isle, at Aberlady, Tranent and Ladykirk. A Spotted Crake called on South Uist. An American Golden Plover was on Fair Isle. Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers were scarce, but 40 of the former were on Benbecula. A Pectoral Sandpiper was at Musselburgh and 2 on Fair Isle. This was a good autumn for Black-tailed Godwits, Green-shanks and Wood Sandpipers. Wilson's Phalaropes appeared at Findhorn and Lothian with Grey Phalaropes at Sumburgh and South Uist.

Long-tailed Skuas were off 8 sites from Fair Isle to St. Abbs. A Mediterranean Gull was at Doonfoot. Single Sabine's Gulls were off Sumburgh, Peterhead, Girdleness and Musselburgh, but a total of 10 between Corsewall and Troon from 5-10 September was exceptional. An adult Ross's Gull joined the Sabine's off Girdleness on 26th September. Musselburgh produced a new Scottish record when a Lesser Crested Tern appeared from 21 to 22 August. Black Terns were at several sites. A rare, dark-breasted Barn Owl was seen on Rousay in August.

Wrynecks were scarce. Richard's Pipits were on Out Skerries, Fair Isle and Orkney and a Red-throated Pipit was on Fair Isle. Grey

headed Wagtails bred in Shetland, a Blue-headed bird was at Peterhead and one of the eastern races was on Fair Isle, which also had a Citrine Wagtail. Five Bluethroats were reported from the Northern Isles, while Fair Isle had an early Black Redstart on 2nd July. Stonechats were seen at Sumburgh and on Fair Isle, whilst Quendale had a Siberian Stonechat and Fair Isle 4 more on 29 September. A Lanceolated Warbler at Scatness was the first mainland Shetland record; Fair Isle had 3 in September. The only Aquatic Warbler was on Foula on 15 August. Fair Isle had both Paddyfield and Blyth's Reed Warblers and a Marsh Warbler. Shetland had a Melodious Warbler. Barred Warblers were scarce this year. The influx of Greenish Warblers involved 6 in Shetland, 1 on Fair Isle and 1 at St. Abbs between 13 August and 9 September.



Yellow-browed Warbler Mike Ashley

Arctic Warblers were seen on Unst, Fair Isle, North Ronaldsay and at Wick. Yellow-browed Warblers appeared in Shetland from 21 September. This was a good autumn for Wood Warblers. St. Abbs had a Firecrest on 20 September. Red-breasted Flycatchers included 5 in Shetland, 1 on Fair Isle and 2 adult males on North Ronaldsay, but Red-backed Shrikes were scarce.

The Dufftown Rose-coloured Starling stayed into July. An Arctic Redpoll, probably of the Greenland race, was on Fair Isle. The influx of Two-barred Crossbills into the Northern Isles included 21 in Shetland, 3 on Fair Isle and 3 in Orkney between 9 and 22 August. Shetland also had Scarlet Rosefinches. Fair Isle produced a first record for Scotland, and only the second record for the Western Palearctic, in the form of a Savannah Sparrow on 30 September. Unusually high numbers of Lapland Buntings included a maximum of 70 on Fair Isle and 32 on North Ronaldsay on 11 September. Single Oortolans were on Shetland and Fair Isle, where there was also a Rustic, and 3 Little Buntings, with singles on Out Skerries and near Kirkwall. A Yellow-breasted Bunting was at Scatness in Shetland, but Fair Isle produced at least 5.

## STOP PRESS

October has produced an amazing number of rarities, including a dead Green Heron at Tynninghame, a Harlequin Duck on Islay, a bucket full of Olive-backed Pipits in the Northern Isles, Eye-browed Thrush on Fair Isle, Black-throated Thrush and Isabelline Shrike in Shetland, 3 Pine Buntings on Fair Isle and another on North Ronaldsay.

Pete Ellis

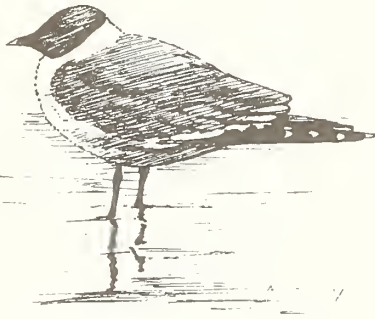
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Sabine's Gull Mike Ashley

Other destinations include St Kilda near home, to watch Puffins, and the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic to watch King Penguins and Crested Caracaras.

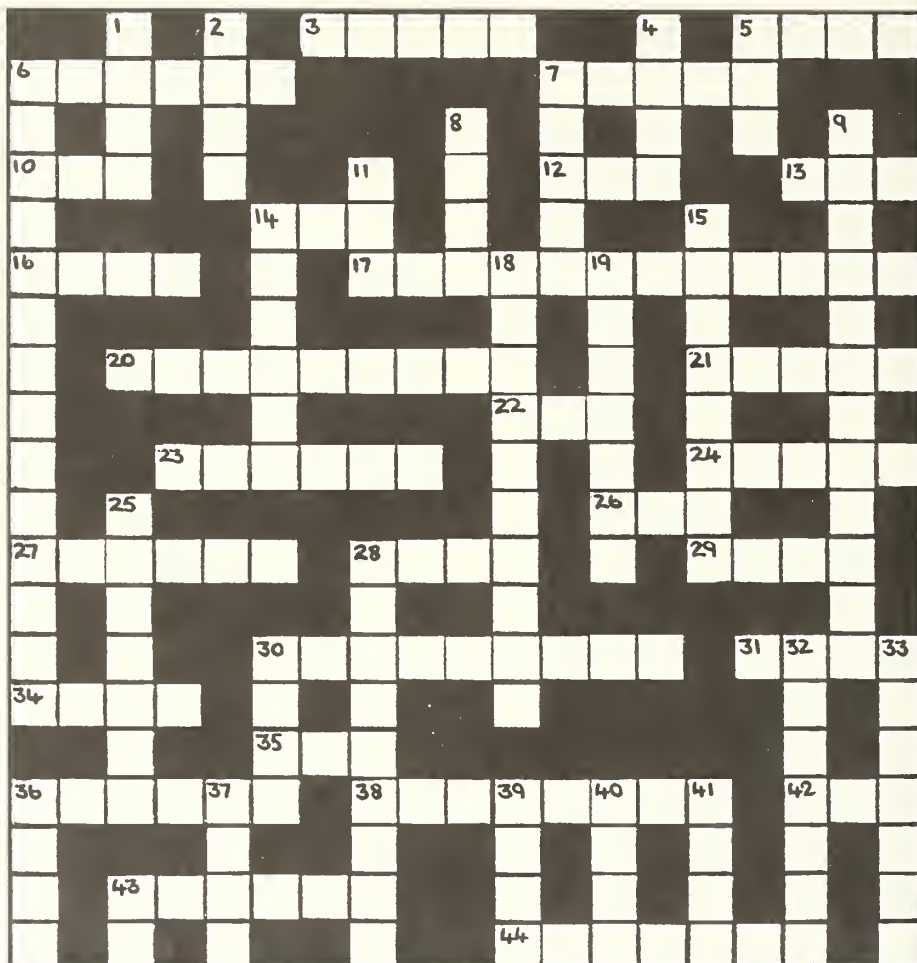
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# Birdword

## Clues across

3. Dives like a diver but isn't one (5).
5. Raptor reintroduced recently (4).
6. Sea parrot (6).
7. St. Kildan way of catching 6 across (5).
10. Trendy biological term for a steady state (initials) (3).
12. Tropical finch with religious connotation (3).
13. Flies like a bird but isn't one (3).
14. Early birds encounter this along with worms (3).
16. Controls the numbers of most birds (4).
17. Our most elusive breeding seabird (12).
20. Northern wader that feeds like a seabird (9).
21. Phone them if you find oiled birds (5).
22. Tropical tree that migrants might perch on (3).
23. Most of them breed on Scottish islands (6).
24. Birds putting 36 down in their feathers indulge in these movements (5).
26. If the engine fails on an island trip you may need two of them (3).
27. Whaup (6).
28. What this magazine is about (4).
29. Small duck (4).
30. Bachelor finch with cheery song (9).
31. Not our smallest but could be our commonest bird (4).
34. This warbler rarely warbles in Scottish ..... beds (4).
35. Northern version of penguins (3).
36. Small, Pacific version of 35 (6).
38. Most likely warbler in winter in Scotland (8).
42. Bird in a cage (3).
43. Has spat and spread around British coasts (6).
44. The motorway falcon (7).



Answers on page 9

## Clues down

1. Birds could be the real explanation for some of these (initials) (3).
2. Most species use these to get around (4).
4. Sea swallow (4).
5. Did it come before the hen? (3)
6. Nest boxes can attract these attractive migrants (14).
7. They mostly eat seeds (5).
8. Northern pirate (4).
9. Horse of the woods, if you know the Gaelic (12).
11. Wise old? (3)
14. Commonest small wader (6).
15. Flickering fire tail (8).
18. SOC emblem (10).
19. One of these may not make your summer (7).
25. Feeding on 36 down may give it a sore neck (7).
28. Four and twenty make a pie (9).
30. Talkative relative of the thrushes (4).
32. Smart little redhead (7).
33. Shetland village sounds good for breeding in (7).
36. Six legged aids to feather maintenance, especially with corvids (4).
37. Herons like these slippery customers (4).
39. Male of the species (4).
40. Biggest threat to garden birds (4).
41. What 40 does after eating a bird (4).
43. Caithness tree planters (initials) (2).

## Mink in the Outer Hebrides

In the 1950's American mink were reared on three small farms in Lewis. These were closed down in 1961 and it must be assumed that the feral mink which began to appear in Lewis afterwards were escapees. At first their depredations among domestic poultry were blamed on feral polecats descended from escaped ferrets until dead specimens were found in 1969. A feral population of escaped ferrets had existed in these islands long before the arrival of the mink with their main concentration around Barvas in west Lewis, where rabbits abound in machair devastated by sand blow-outs. Their inter-action with mink is unknown.

The spread of mink over the island and into Harris was rapid. It was hoped that the Sound of Harris would prevent an invasion of the southern isles but, in 1986, a mink was killed in South Uist and one or two dead specimens were found in North Uist.

In 1975 an Aberdeen University expedition studied the diet of mink at Aird Bheag, in west Lewis, to discover if they were competing with otters. They found that mink were mainly littoral foragers whose diet comprised 36% vegetation, 30% invertebrates, 22% fish, 9% mammals and only 3% birds. A trapping campaign was launched by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland which failed to contain the spread, but which still yields hundreds of mink every year. No statistics of mink distribution or control are

available but it has been established that it is the males which range inland and cause damage to wildlife while the females seem to remain on the coast. Apart from gamekeepers and, now, fish farmers no-one seems to take the problem seriously until domestic poultry are slaughtered when there is a flurry of local activity.

In Lewis and Harris Little Grebes, Moorhens and Coots have disappeared and the scarcity or disappearance of several other ground or hole nesting species can be attributed, in the writer's opinion, to mink. For example, terns have abandoned several offshore islands on the west of Lewis and Harris and vulnerable woodland birds, such as the Treecreeper, have almost disappeared from the Stornoway Woods. It is unfortunate that no specific study of this problem has been made.

It is to be hoped that the people of the Uists and Benbecula will learn from what has happened in Lewis and Harris and make every effort to prevent or, at least, contain any invasion of their islands by mink as the very important populations of waders and wildfowl in the southern isles would be jeopardised by a similar explosion there. A "Mink Committee" has been formed in the south islands which should be bad news for any musteline adventurer!

Peter Cunningham

# Scottish Atlas Organiser

Dr Jim Reid has been appointed the SOC's Scottish Organiser of the New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain & Ireland. A 35 year old Glaswegian, Jim is married and lives in Crail on the East Neuk of Fife. He took his first degree at Stirling University and his Ph.D., on aspects of the behaviour and ecology of the rook, at St. Andrews. He has been a research fellow at Keele and St. Andrew's Universities working on domestic dogs, magpies and blackbirds. He spent last summer working on the Isle of May with Dr Mike Harris.

Jim Reid started work in November and if he has not already done so will be in touch with BTO regional representatives and SOC local recorders to keep them informed of plans for next year's fieldwork. He will also be visiting some branches in the New Year and speaking at the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference in Inverness in March.

Following comprehensive pilot fieldwork last summer, the Atlas Working Group has decided that the census method will be based on sampling tetrads (2 x 2 km squares) for the presence/absence of species within a 10 km square. Rare or colonial species will be counted directly or their numbers assessed from existing data, like the Seabird Colony Register. Fieldwork is planned for the three years 1988-1990. Full details of the survey methods and recording cards will be mailed to all members with the March issue of *SBN*.

At the time of writing we have funding for this project for 15 months thanks to the Nature Conservancy Council's Commissioned Research Programme, the Gilman Trust, the

George Waterston Memorial Fund and the SOC's Jubilee Appeal & Endowment Funds. A newly formed fund raising committee chaired by Ian Darling is actively pursuing further sources of finance. There is confidence that funds for a further two years will be forthcoming in due course.

## Goshawk retrieving prey from loch

At 1152 GMT On 16th May 1987, beside a wooded loch in Speyside, Inverness-shire, I was startled by a large raptor crashing into the Scots Pine canopy above me. Looking up, I saw a male Goshawk leaving the tree tops, and, as it flew out over the loch, drop an object from its talons. The object fell into the loch c. 10m from the shore. Through binoculars I identified it as a female or juvenile Crossbill which appeared to be dead.

The Goshawk circled and dropped to a height of about 5 m above the water, and dashed towards the prey. When immediately over the Crossbill the hawk struck down with its legs in an unsuccessful attempt to retrieve it from the water. This was repeated half a dozen times before the Goshawk seized its prey in its talons and carried it off. The entire incident took about two minutes. The water in the loch was very calm which may have aided the Goshawk in picking up the dead Crossbill from the water surface.

Keith Rickard



Goshawk

Doug Weir

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# Scotland's seabirds come out on top

When the Seabird Group first established the Seabird Colony Register and enlisted support from the Nature Conservancy Council in 1984, the idea of having all the data on seabird breeding numbers in Britain and Ireland contained in one place seemed a remote possibility. But, as completion of the Register draws near, requests for information are already coming in and the Register is showing its worth and repaying the efforts of the army of surveyors who did the fieldwork.

Over 370 volunteers, the majority of them in Scotland, have helped collect up-to-date details of the distribution and size of seabird colonies around our coasts. Coverage of the coastline has crept gradually towards 100% since the summer of 1985 when fieldwork began. All that remains now are a few tantalizing sections which will have to be examined in 1988. The main gaps are in Lewis, including the Flannan Isles, much of Skye, at Clo Mor in northwest Sutherland, and the Blaskets in southwest Ireland. My special thanks to all of you who helped with the seabird counts this summer and took trouble in completing and returning recording forms.

## Computerisation

In addition to this recent information the Register holds past data as far back as the Operation Seafarer counts (1969-70). This has been gleaned from bird reports and other publications, and from people who have visited colonies in the intervening time, in some cases almost annually over the last 19 years. The Register data, which now occupies six filing cabinet drawers, would be impossibly laborious to use if we had to rely on these paper records. More than half the data have been stored on a computer and data entry should be completed by Christmas. In this form information can be quickly retrieved from the database and in different combinations as required. Questions such as 'what proportion of our Kittiwakes breed at Fowlsheugh?' can now be answered and I can say now that, with over 40,000 nests,

Fowlsheugh and adjacent cliffs have the largest Kittiwake colony in Britain and Ireland.

## Upward trends

Comparisons between the modern data and that collected by Operation Seafarer have to be made with caution because of different counting methods used, but they show up some clearcut patterns. Almost all species in Scotland have done extremely well since 1969. For example, the remote Ascarib Islands off northwest Skye, visited by canoe this summer, have become inundated with auks. Roger Powell, who did the Seafarer counts in 1970 and landed again this summer, reports that Guillemots have increased from 250 to over 2000 birds, and Razorbills more modestly from 200 to 760 birds. The colonies have covered the main islet, An t-Isgair, and spread to the offshore stacks of An Dubh Sgeir. Similar scales of increase have been recorded at auk colonies nearby including Canna and the Shiant. Counting seabirds is never easy and the Register records the kind of problems that are encountered. As Roger put it, "a strong rip tide and impending gale limited the length of the visit but considerably increased the adrenalin".

The largest seabird colony in Britain is still St. Kilda which was surveyed by the NCC Seabirds at Sea Team this summer. Nearly three quarters of a million seabirds, excluding unknown numbers of nocturnal petrels, breed on these rocky islands and stacks 66 km from the nearest land. The most numerous are Fulmars with 62,800 pairs, Gannets 50,050

pairs in 1985 and Puffins estimated at 230,500 pairs. The spectacular island of Handa holds the largest of our Razorbill and Guillemot colonies and the fourth largest for Kittiwakes. Counts by the RSPB wardens gave totals of 98,700 Guillemots, 16,400 Razorbills and 10,730 pairs of Kittiwakes, all considerably higher than in 1969.

## Gulls in decline

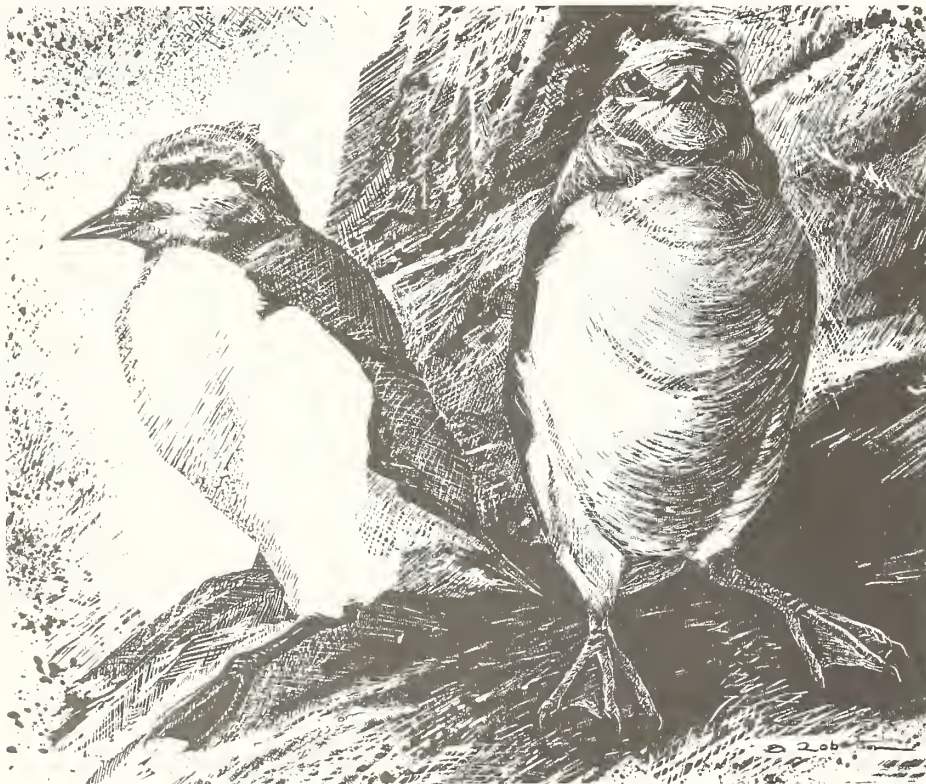
One group that have fared less well are the large gulls. Herring Gull numbers have at least halved in the last two decades throughout north and east Scotland, and also in England, Wales and Ireland. The only places where Herring Gull colonies are generally the same size or bigger than they were in 1969-70 are the large islands of Argyll and Bute especially Islay and Mull, and on the mainland from the Mull of Kintyre to the Mull of Galloway. Why these changes should have occurred is far from clear but, since the decline in numbers is mirrored, albeit less drastically, by Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and is so widespread, it seems likely that an alteration in the abundance or quality of the gulls' food has occurred. Disease, particularly botulism, has also killed large numbers of gulls in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in recent years, and is occasionally reported in Scotland.

## Numbers inland

Seabird colonies inland were not covered by the 1985-87 survey or by Seafarer although some data were collected. However, in the Northern Isles, where it is difficult to describe any site as truly inland, complete moorland surveys were carried out. The Orkney skua survey in 1982 gave totals for Great and Arctic Skuas respectively of 1652 and 1034 occupied territories which compared with 482 and 716 pairs in 1974-75, and 90 and 230 pairs in 1969-70. Similar increases since Seafarer, from 3060 pairs to 5647 occupied territories for Bonxies, and 770 pairs to 1912 territories for Arctic Skuas, were revealed by surveys in Shetland during 1985 and 1986. Both species also continue to thrive on the mainland of northern Scotland and to spread down the west coast and on offshore islands.

In addition to the skuas, large numbers of nesting gulls and some big tern colonies are also found inland, especially in the Northern and Western Isles. As a result of the 1986 and 1987 surveys, for example, one ten square including part of Hoy holds the record for maximum number (48) of occupied seabird colonies. A more comprehensive census of inland seabird colonies is one of the aims for the future, especially in view of the approaching Atlas.

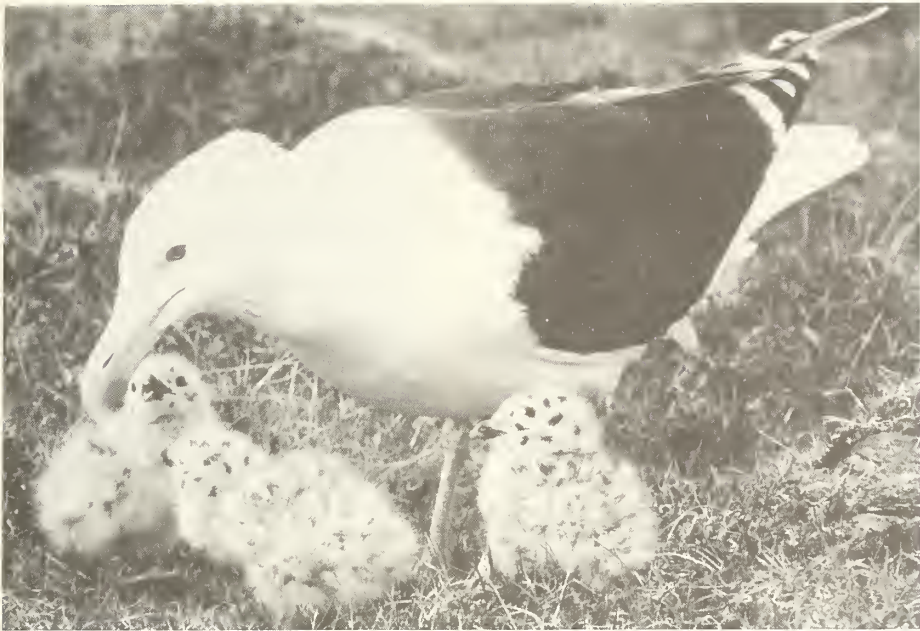
Clare Lloyd



Guillemot chicks

Derek Robertson

Dr Lloyd has been a seabird enthusiast for many years, studying Razorbills for her PhD. She is currently national organiser for the Seabird Colony Register based at NCC, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen.



Great Black-backed Gull and chicks

D. Hassell

This attractive shot won first prize in the 1987 Photo Competition

SOME PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE SEABIRD COLONY REGISTER

| Species      | North  | North West | Grampian | West Isles |
|--------------|--------|------------|----------|------------|
| Fulmar       | + 43%  | + 81%      | + 85%    | + 41%      |
| (pairs)      | 21615  | 11033      | 8590     | 3463       |
| Shag         | - 50%  | + 48%      | + 85%    | no change  |
| (pairs)      | 613    | 1618       | 628      | 925        |
| Herring Gull | - 85%  | - 51%      | - 59%    | + 30%      |
| (pairs)      | 1034   | 2244       | 18730    | 6290       |
| Kittiwake    | + 7%   | + 29%      | + 29%    | + 101%     |
| (pairs)      | 11230  | 11298      | 83117    | 6544       |
| Guillemot    | + 120% | + 219%     | + 85%    | + 556%     |
| (birds)      | 23368  | 99429      | 86850    | 20856      |

The table shows changes in certain seabird populations since Operation Seafarer (1969-70), with the total counts for 1985-87 given below each percentage change. N.B. These figures are provisional since the data are not yet complete.

North = Cape Wrath - Duncansby Hd; North West = Cape Wrath - Loch Alsh; West Isles = islands off Argyll & Bute.

Death at sea

On 16 July 1987 while walking with my family on the east shore of Loch na Lathaich, a sea loch on the Ross of Mull, we startled a Buzzard, which subsequently made three short flights round small headlands, keeping just ahead of us. Finally, it flew out onto a rocky spit where it was mobbed by a pair of Oystercatchers and several Common Gulls. They were successful in making it take off, but this time it flew out low over the sea towards the other side of the bay, a mile away. The gulls continued to dive at it, forcing it lower and lower, until about 150 metres offshore it landed on the sea. It made one successful attempt to rise, flew for perhaps 20 metres, but was again driven down onto the water, where it lay with wings spread out. After that we watched for 25 minutes while

it was blown out to sea by the wind. It made unsuccessful attempts for a time to rise, being dive-bombed continually by gulls. Shags, presumably attracted by the noise, made low-flying passes over it, landing near and diving under it. Eventually, when we could see no movement from the Buzzard, all the birds left, except two gulls, which sat like sentries on either side of the body, occasionally pecking at it. By the time they finally left, we could no longer see the receding speck of the body. Could the bird have been a juvenile? This might explain its reluctance to fly any great distance when disturbed, its inability to shake off or ignore the birds mobbing it, and its landing on the sea.

Ann M. Miles



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# Birdwatching at the Hirsal

The Hirsal offers excellent opportunities to see woodland birds and waterfowl in attractive surroundings, now enhanced by the new SOC hide. Local recorder and author of *Birds of the Borders* Ray Murray describes the birds while Borders Branch secretary Malcolm Ross explains how the branch is building hides which help you get better views of them.

The Hirsal is located to the north and east of Coldstream; the main entrance is signposted on the A968 (Edinburgh/Kelso) road at the edge of town. The car park is about 1½km from the main road (NT 827 403), adjacent to a converted stable block that is being developed as a visitor and craft centre. Signposted paths around the estate radiate from this car park. There is another car park on the A697 next to the Dundock Wood (NT 818 400). The estate has been studied ornithologically for some years and has an impressive list of nearly 150 species. The late Henry Douglas-Home, often called the Bird-man of the Hirsal, was responsible for much of our detailed knowledge and he was also the founder of the long-term study of Swifts that annually occupy nest-boxes sited below the windows of the mansion. The main features of the estate are the policy woodlands and the Hirsal Lake. There are a number of walks that are open to the public for much of the year that give good coverage of the best sites.

## The Lake

The shallow lake occupies about 17 hectares and for its size must be one of the best in Scotland. The shores provide nest sites, good shelter and excellent roosting for waterfowl. They are reed-lined to the north and wooded to the south. Viewpoints were mainly restricted to the dam shore in the past, the height of the reeds preventing good views from the path round the lake. The new hide has solved this and we anticipate more accurate counts in the future. A walk round the Lake is still necessary for a full count as the south-west corner cannot be viewed from the dam or the hide. In spite of this many birds are missed because of the dense cover of the surrounding woods.



Redstart

W.E. Middleton

Runner up in the 1987 Photo Competition.

The breeding population is considerable, the main species being Mallard and Coot. In 1987 approximately 30 female Mallard produced 16 broods and 20 pairs of Coot produce a minimum of 84 juveniles. Other breeding species in 1987 were Moorhen, Tufted Duck, Pochard, Shoveler, Mute Swan and Little Grebe. The reed beds also hold Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting.

Waterfowl numbers increase at the end of the breeding season. The proximity of the Tweed means that many birds use the Hirsal as a roost, especially when the river is in spate or disturbed by anglers. August and September produce good numbers of Mallard and Coot but the 863 Mallard in late August 1984 was exceptional. Shoveler increase as passage birds arrive; usually peaking in October at 100 birds. Early winter months are the best time of year for waterfowl as the water surface can be literally swarming with birds, particularly at dusk when the roosting species flight in. Peak counts have included 165 Mute Swans in October, 317 Whooper Swans in November, 800 Greylag Geese in December, 400 Wigeon in September and 97 Goosander in October.

Up to 30 Mute Swans are frequent but large numbers only occur when the Tweed is in flood. Diving ducks are scarce in the autumn but show a peak in spring, especially Goldeneye, Pintail, Scaup and Smew are virtually annual and other waterfowl recorded are Slavonian and Black-necked Grebes, Canada Goose, Mandarin, Gadwall and Ruddy Duck. The loch provides excellent roosting and feeding for hirundines on passage. Water Rail can be heard at any time of the year, but are commoner in winter. Whether they breed is doubtful but hard to prove. The lack of bare mud or shingle means that waders are scarce.



SOC hide at the Hirsal

Stephen Chamberlain

## Dundock Woods

The deciduous woodlands of the Hirsal are the second major attraction of the estate, particularly in spring and summer. The best time of year is May and June when Dundock is full of song and ablaze with Rhododendrons and Azaleas. Many otherwise single-minded birders comment that the floral display alone is worth a visit to the Hirsal.

The tall canopy of oak, ash and pine with its dense understorey and maze of footpaths and boggy ditches provides a wealth of habitat for woodland birds, particularly warblers. A count in 1987 revealed territories of 18 Garden Warblers, 16 Blackcaps, 11 Spotted Flycatchers, 5 Redstarts, 2 Pied Flycatchers as well as Mistle Thrush, Treecreepers, Long-tailed Tits, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Stock Doves, Chiffchaffs, Sedge Warblers and one Whitethroat. In addition there are probably a minimum of 5 pairs of Marsh Tits and 2 pairs of Hawfinch as well as commoner species. The ease with which the Marsh Tits of the Hirsal can be found in Dundock has made that species one of the specialities of the site for Scottish birders.

Passage migrants such as Wood Warbler, Tree Pipit and Lesser Whitethroat occasionally pause to sing in May and early June and rarer species like Little Owl, Nuthatch and Wryneck have also been reported.

## Leet Walk

Another path, running between the main house and the old stable block, goes down to the Leet Water, a small tributary of the Tweed. The path is circular, following the Leet and leads back to the Visitor Centre car park. The Leet meanders its way through open fields of moist, permanent pasture surrounded by deciduous woodland on steep banks. The woods hold much the same species as Dundock but the best sites for Hawfinch at the Hirsal is on this walk, in the fruit trees that grow between the stable block and the mansion. The Leet provides habitat for river species and has breeding Grey and Pied Wagtail, Dipper, Common Sandpiper and, from time to time, Kingfisher. Kingfisher bred for some years just above the first bridge on this walk but the run of cold winters recently has seen them off. Passage birds attracted to the Leet include Green and Wood Sandpiper and Yellow Wagtail.

Ray Murray

## SOC hides in the Borders

The George Waterston Memorial Hide at the Hirsell was recently opened by Lady Caroline Douglas-Home, daughter of Lord Home. The Borders Branch undertook this as their major project for the S.O.C. Golden Jubilee. It was funded by a grant of £700 from the Waterston Memorial Fund and £100 from Borders Branch. Design and construction was by a Community Project Team from Borders Regional Council funded by the Manpower Services Commission.

The hide was constructed in units and erected on a base 5 ft above ground to improve the outlook over the lake. Larch screen fences were used to allow access without disturbing birds on the water. It was also necessary to remove branches from adjacent trees to improve the field of view. During this work the branch treasurer had the misfortune to fall 15 ft into the lake. Fortunately he was wearing thigh waders so at least his legs remained dry.

This is the second hide erected by the Borders Branch, the first being at Hule Moss, Greenlaw. By using Community Project workers the cost was considerably reduced as their services are provided without charge for projects of benefit to the community. The only costs involved were for materials and transport. The Hule Moss hide received grant aid from N.C.C. and from S.W.T. Tweed Valley Branch but the Hirsell hide was a 100% S.O.C. project. The Borders Branch hope to construct more hides which help bring the Club to the notice of the general public who have free access to the hides.

Malcolm Ross

## Restriction on shooting at Strathbeg

The Secretary of State has decided as the result of the public inquiry in Peterhead last spring (see *SBN* 6) to lift the total ban on shooting from the three islets and peninsula in the middle of the country's second largest goose roost at the Loch of Strathbeg, but impose a new one reducing it to not more than four guns during the period between one and a half hours after sunrise and one and a half hours before sunset on not more than six days per winter. This involves the end of shooting in the centre of the main roost during the hours of darkness, and a considerable reduction of the amount of duck-shooting in the daytime (with the advantage that the birds are now likely to move to the quieter area in front of the RSPB hides). The conservation side are reasonably content with the compromise, especially since the public discussion of the way in which this shooting was formerly managed seems likely to lead to an improvement.

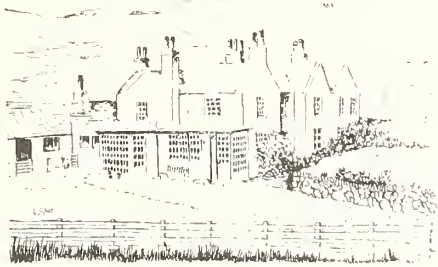
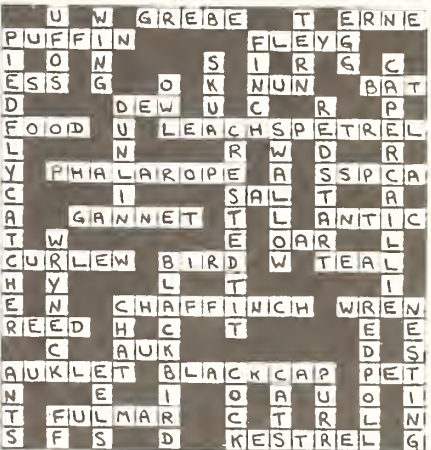
The landowner has complained at the way in which it was found necessary to hold an expensive public inquiry to obtain a result which might have been achieved faster through friendly negotiation. It seems a pity that he did not agree to some restriction of the shooting sooner.

W.R.P. Bourne

## Ayr Branch celebrate 25 years

On May 20th, forty four members of the Ayr Branch met at Culzean Country Park to celebrate a quarter of a century of S.O.C. involvement. The Park's Ranger Service took the group for an evening's bird watching, the highlights being Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warblers (which have only recently become established), a bemused Tawny Owllet in a Southern nest box and eight cygnets being bedded down for the night in the reed beds. Everyone convened later at the Visitor Centre for a celebratory drink and supper. Mrs. Jean Burton, Chairperson, rounded off the evening with a few words. The Ayr Branch is alive and well and looking forward to the next twenty five years.

Gordon Riddle



## Isles of Colonsay and Oronsay – Inner Hebrides

Remote and unspoilt, the islands encompass 20 square miles of paradise for the naturalist – almost 170 species of birds (list on request), also otters, feral goats and a major breeding colony of the grey seal (pupping in September), 500 species of local flora as well as two of the few remaining natural woodlands of the Hebrides and the exotic rhododendron collection in the woodland garden of Colonsay House.

Historic sites include St Columba's pre-Iona foundation at Oronsay Priory, some excellent duns, a Viking ship burial, crannog-sites in Loch Fada etc.

There are no day-trippers, no caravanners, etc., but there is a comfortable small hotel offering table d'hôte cuisine based on fresh local produce (central heating and private facilities). Drive on-off car and passenger ferry ex-Oban Monday, Wednesday, Friday (2½ hour passage). Dinner, accommodation and breakfast from £27.50 including VAT and service. Free bicycles. There are also three luxury self-catering chalets, which adjoin the hotel; each unit sleeps 5, all bed-linen is provided plus daily maid service. Off-season rental is only £60.00 weekly. Also special demi-pension arrangements for Field Study parties from £9.25 daily. Details on request.

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## Reviews

**The skuas** by Robert W Furness; Poyser; 1987; 368pp; 30 b&w plates; £18.

This is the third high quality Poyser book published in recent years to incorporate results of work on seabirds conducted in Scotland. The book starts with a lucid review of the complex subject of skua systematics; the author reaches the conclusion that the (northern) Great Skua may well have arisen from the Falkland Skua - the colonial history of skuas is evidently the reverse of that of humans! The following chapters deal with distribution, population size and migration; these provide a good summary, though some of the examples of distribution at-sea are a little obscure, with most of the work of large scale at-sea projects omitted. Some skua specialities are dealt with in Ch. 5-9, and include a useful discussion of the reasons for plumage polymorphism. Breeding biology and related topics are reviewed in Ch. 10-13, before the last three chapters which review man's impact on skuas and vice versa. These provide some interesting predictions on the future of the skua populations in Britain, and some sensible discussion about ways in which skua conservation may be advanced.

I enjoyed this book, and shall appreciate it as a source of reference for some time; as with most books, the detail it adds over and above normal scientific papers will make it most useful. I recommend it to anyone with an interest in seabirds or the interaction between birds and their environment.

**Mark L Tasker**

**Save the Birds** Principal author, Anthony Diamond. Produced by ProNatur of Germany in association with the International Council for Bird Preservation. 384 pp, many colour illustrations. C.U.P. 1987 £17.50.

This book is beautifully reproduced, with excellent printing on quality paper and all the illustrations in colour and very much to the point. The main approach is by the main habitats of the world, and some of their birds; rare ones that are about to become extinct, such as the Mauritius kestrel, or the ones that may already have reached that situation. But it is not all gloom and doom as there are details of rare species which have been saved by dramatic operations such as the Chatham Black Robins in New Zealand. Nor is it all rare birds as scattered through the sections are common birds such as House Sparrow and Collared Dove and how they fit into the general pattern. The last 31 pages are devoted to Britain, written by David Attenborough and Ian Prestt and just as exciting as the rest of the book. Other countries, where this book will be published, will also have these pages devoted to their particular country, while the rest will be the same as our edition, though with the words translated - even for the Americans! For every book sold there is a contribution to the ICBP to finance three international projects. Buy it now and you will enjoy and learn a lot while helping bird conservation in the world.

**Frank Hamilton**

**RSPB Conservation Review No. 1, 1987;** James Cadbury & Michael Everett (eds.) 96pp. colour and b&w illustrations; RSPB; £3.

A beautifully produced publication with 19 articles on the conservation of British birds, mostly by RSPB staff, or people working on projects with RSPB involvement, plus summaries of RSPB projects in 1986. This is a much more satisfying read than Birds magazine and will be particularly useful to planners and other land managers who want to know current research results without ploughing through the scientific literature. It should also appeal to the keen amateur. My chief reservation is that it will often be quoted as though it is a journal when it is really an in house magazine that does not seem to use independent referees; it will be interesting to see if it ever criticises RSPB policy.

**SdP**

**The Birds of Mull** by Mike Madders; Saker Press; 1987; 48 pp; many maps & illustrations; £3.50 (pbk)

This guide to the birds of Mull is attractively illustrated throughout by Philip Snow. Following an introduction and some notes for visitors birdwatching on Mull, the first half of the booklet describes the birds and habitats of the Isle. The second part of the guide is devoted to a personal selection of locations which offer the visiting birdwatcher the opportunity to see many of Mull's birds. Each site has a map illustrated with the birds to be seen together with notes describing the habitats, the birds and the best locations to see them. There is a piece on Mull's birdlife in a changing landscape, a comprehensive systematic list and some useful names and addresses. Recommended for anyone birdwatching on Mull.

**John C Davies**

**Where to Watch Birds in Beds, Berks, Bucks, Herts and Oxon** by Brian Clews, Andrew Meryet & Paul Trodd; Christopher Helm; 1987; 316 pp; many maps and drwgs; £9.95 (pbk).

**Where to Watch Birds in Kent, Surrey & Sussex** by Don Taylor, Jeffery Wheatley & Tony Prater; Christopher Helm; 1987; 270 pp; many maps & drwgs; £9.95 (pbk).

**Where to Watch Birds in The West Midlands** by Graham Harrison & Jack Sankey; Christopher Helm; 1987; 275 pp; many maps & drwgs; £9.95 (pbk).

**Where to Watch Birds in Wales** by David Saunders; Christopher Helm; 1987; 245 pp; many maps & drwgs; £8.95 (pbk).

Another four paperbacks in this excellent series of regional guides to birdwatching localities south of the border (Devon & Cornwall and East Anglia have already been published). Each book has a general introduction to the region (or country) followed by a list of birdwatching sites. Each site has a map site description, details of species to be seen, timing your visit, access information and a calendar listing the birds season by season. Attractively illustrated and packed with useful information, these guides are invaluable to visiting (and resident) birdwatchers in England and Wales.

**John C Davies**



## The SKUAS

by ROBERT W FURNESS

The full classification of the skuas is still debated, but Dr Furness of the Applied Ornithology Unit, Glasgow University, favours six species, of two genera, with five subspecies, based on current knowledge and his own long and dedicated field studies and research.

All of the species are treated comparatively under the following chapter titles: Early history and classification, Distributions and populations, Migration patterns, Reversed sexual size dimorphism, Behaviour, Food and feeding, Kleptoparasitism, Plumage polymorphism, Breeding systems and social organisation, Breeding - laying to hatching, Breeding - hatching to fledging, Population dynamics, Pollutants, Skuas and agriculture, Skuas and conservation.

The text is supported by 100 maps and diagrams, 30 photographs and 65 tables. In addition, John Busby contributes 35 evocative drawings which more than embellish this erudite and readable summary of an impressive and diverse group of birds.

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## SBN Advertising Rates

Full page £100. Half page £60. Quarter page across £30. Sixth page £20. Third page upright £40. Small ads £2 per line. Prices are exclusive of VAT. Adverts should be sent to Business Editor, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

## Deadlines

SBN is published four times a year, at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Material submitted for possible publication should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 8 weeks prior to publication (e.g. by 1 January for the March number), although late news and notices may be accepted slightly later. Queries - and suggestions - will be welcomed by the Editor. Information on the submission of material for *Scottish Birds*, will be found in *SB 14(1)*.

## SOC Membership

Membership subscription rates are as follows:  
 Adult ..... £10.00  
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 ..... £14.50  
 Life, individual £200.00, family £300.00  
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 Further details from Membership Secretary,  
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## SOC Notices

### Subscriptions reminder

Members who have not already renewed their subscriptions for 1987/88 will find a subscription renewal slip with this copy of *SBN*. Please renew your subscription now by completing the slip and returning it to Susan Mackenzie, the membership secretary.

### Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

The programme and booking form for the joint SOC/BTO one-day conference on Saturday, 5th March 1988 in Inverness are enclosed. We know there'll be a good turnout from Highland Branch members and we hope members from Grampian, Tayside and further south will make it too. These one-day regional conferences are always popular so don't delay sending off your booking form as numbers will be limited to 200.

### Annual Conference 1988

By popular demand the SOC's 1988 Annual Conference returns to the Marine Hotel, North Berwick for the weekend 28th-30th October 1988. Further details in due course, but make a note in your diaries now.

### Annual raffle

By popular demand and thanks to Alastair Peirse-Duncombe and the Borders Branch the Club's annual raffle has been re-instated to help raise funds for the SOC. A book of raffle tickets is enclosed with details of the fine selection of prizes. We hope you will give your support. Ticket stubs and money are to be returned direct to Alastair. Thank you in advance for your help.

### New President

Dr Jeremy Greenwood was elected President of the Club at the AGM in September. A week or so earlier he had learnt that he was to be the new Director of the BTO as from 1st January 1988. Jeremy will be a great loss to the Club, but we wish him all the very best in his new job in Tring, Hertfordshire. Frank Hamilton, the new Vice-President, is unable, due to pressure of work at present, to take over from Jeremy, so Council will be co-opting and nominating a new President to succeed Jeremy from 1st December.

The three new elected members of Council are John Ballantyne (Edinburgh), David Clugston (Glasgow) and Don Smith (Ayrshire).

### New editor for Scottish Birds

Having successfully launched the new *Scottish Birds* as well as *SBN* Valerie Thom is now handing over to Nick Picozzi. As with *SBN* Valerie will assist the new editor until he has mastered the intricacies of printers' proofs. Authors should continue to submit papers via 21 Regent Terrace.

### Staff news

Susan MacLeod, Bookshop Assistant, left on 30th September to have baby Donald on 21st October. Congratulations to Susan and father Iain. Mother and baby are doing fine. We welcomed back David Hunter as Bookshop Assistant in October after 9 months as a furniture salesman - books are better!

### Change of address of local recorders

**STRATHCLYDE** - Iain Gibson's address is now c/o Wood, 47 Kilbowie Road, South Carbrain, Cumbernauld G67 2PZ.

**FIFE** (Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, NE Fife) - Dougie Dickson's address is now 20 Rosabelle Street, Kirkcaldy, Fife KY1 3DW.

### New sales leaflet

In response to numerous requests we have at last produced a Sales Leaflet of sundry items. SOC ties and car stickers are back in stock and we now sell SOC sweatshirts. We still have some Jubilee items left and don't forget the SOC Field List and Checklist. Further details and an order form are on the pink Sales Leaflet enclosed with this issue of *SBN*.

### Sanderling sightings

Please send any sightings of Sanderling on the east coast of Scotland to **Bruce Lynch**, 15 Falkland Crescent, Broughty Ferry, Dundee.

### Colour-ringed Snow Buntings

It is expected that several hundred Snow Buntings will be colour-ringed in Caithness this winter. If any birds with colour rings are seen I would be delighted to hear the details; where and when they were spotted and what the ring colours were. Thanks for your help.

**Hugh Clark**, 3 Lindsay Place, Wick, Caithness

## Small ads

**CAITHNESS BIRD REPORT 1986.** £3.00 from either The Bird Bookshop or Eric Maughan, Burnside, Harbour Road, Reay, Thurso, Caithness KW14 7RG.

**4TH ARGYLL BIRD REPORT (1986)** £3.50 from either The Bird Bookshop or Colin Galbraith, 4 Achagoil, Minard, Inveraray, Argyll PA32 8YE.

**SCOTTISH BIRDS INDEX** Cumulative Computer Index Vols 1-13. All mentions of a species entered. Over 6200 entries. £5. David A Macleaman, 14 Ochardhead Road, Edinburgh EH16 6HL.

**WILDFOWL TRUST ANNUAL REPORTS** Nos 3 to 30. Excluding 25 and 28 £75 o.n.o. Tel: 031-339 3787.

**BIRD JOURNAL** back numbers supplied - D. Morgan, Whitmore, Umerleigh, Devon.

**APRIL COTTAGE.** Stay in this cosy Sussex flint cottage and enjoy the bird life and beauty of the Cuckmere Estuary, the Heritage Coast and South Downs; bed and breakfast with private bathroom £8; other countrystyle meals available as required; open all year. Tel: 0323-890879.

**UPPER GLENISLA - ANGUS.** Very comfortable, well equipped, warm cottage in beautiful setting. Sleeps 3. Available April-October. SAE Mrs Duff, 31 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BS.

**LOTHIAN BIRD REPORT 1986.** £3.30 from Liz Leven, 13 Henderson Row, Edinburgh.









